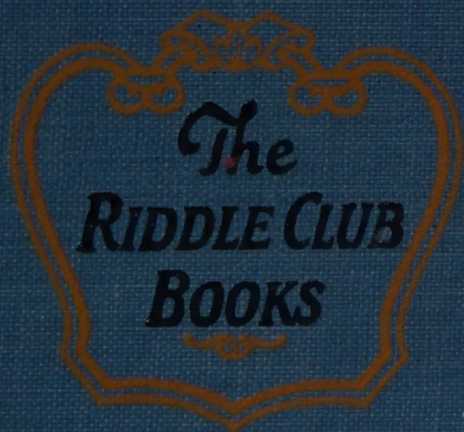


# *The RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME*



*ALICE DALE HARDY*



Presented to  
Loene Clouser

for  
Highest Score  
of the Girls  
for

"My Best Work"

1929-30

Miss Clammer









THE BOYS MANAGED TO WASH THE WINDOW FAIRLY  
CLEAN.  
*The Riddle Club at Home.* Frontispiece—(Page 23)

# THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME

How the Club Was Formed  
What Riddles Were Asked  
And How the Members Solved a Mystery

BY  
ALICE DALE HARDY  
AUTHOR OF "THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP,"  
"THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE  
HOLIDAYS," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED BY*  
WALTER S. ROGERS

NEW YORK  
GROSSET & DUNLAP  
PUBLISHERS

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Made in the United States of America

THE RIDDLE CLUB BOOKS  
BY ALICE DALE HARDY

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12mo. Cloth. Illustrated,

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THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME

THE RIDDLE CLUB IN CAMP

THE RIDDLE CLUB THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

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GROSSET & DUNLAP

Publishers

: :

New York

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*The Riddle Club at Home*



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# THE RIDDLE CLUB AT HOME

## CHAPTER I

### POLLY'S IDEA

"NOTHING ever happens!" complained Jess Larue. "I wouldn't care if something happened once in a while; but even when there is a fire they put it right out!"

Polly Marley laughed and went on hemming boat sails. She had once said that she made new sails for her brother's boat regularly, every week; but Artie was sure he did not ask her to sew for him as often as that. Not that Polly minded. She was a most obliging sister.

"My cousin lives in a town near an aviation field," said Margy Williamson, "and sometimes the airplanes get on fire. Don't they, Fred?"

Her twin brother nodded.

"Hilda saw one once," he explained, "that caught fire up in the air and the pilot jumped. He wasn't hurt much."

"I don't believe it is very exciting to be the

pilot when an airplane is on fire," declared Artie Marley soberly.

He was rather a small chap for his age—he was eight years old—and his blue eyes were often serious.

"Why, yes, it is exciting, too, to be up in an airplane when it's on fire," argued Jess, pushing her dark curly hair out of her eyes. *It would* get in her way when she played jacks.

"I mean, it isn't much fun—not like watching a fire," said Artie.

Margy Williamson seemed to understand.

"No, I don't believe pilots would call it exciting fun," she agreed. "Hilda's mother won't even watch the mail planes. But Hilda does. It's my turn, Jess," she added, holding out her hand for the rubber ball.

The five children were gathered on the side porch of the Marley's house, waiting for Ward Larue, Jess's brother, to come back from the wharf where he had gone to take the afternoon mail to his father. Mr. Larue was the head of the steamboat company whose boats went up and down the beautiful, placid Rocio River, and his office was built on the wharf, or landing, where the boats stopped to take on or let off passengers who wished to visit River Bend.

Jess had been mistaken when she complained



that nothing ever happened at River Bend. Four boats touched at her father's wharf every day, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, and the arrival of a steamboat is, for some reason, much more exciting than the arrival of a train. Perhaps that is because you never can be quite sure what a boat will do or what you will see if you go to the wharf to watch the landing. If the river is swollen with heavy rains, it may have trouble to make the wharf; in summer time you may see big watermelons on the deck; and, always, it is easier to see the people who are getting off because they must all come down one gangplank.

The two Marleys, Polly and Artie, knew all about the steamboats—as much as the two Larues did. So did Margy and Fred Williamson, the tall, dark twins who looked so much alike that people frequently said, "Dear me, you must be twins!" Margy and Fred would answer politely, "We are," and then they would be asked how old they were and would have to say "Ten."

The Marleys, the Larues and the Williamsons, all lived in River Bend. They didn't know how dearly they loved the pretty town with its shady streets and gardens, but that was because they had never been far enough away to be homesick. The Marley house was next door to the Williamson

house on Elm Road and the Larue house stood across the street. It was no wonder that the six children were great chums and played together and went to school together and were never known to be lonesome.

"There—you touched a jack!" cried Jess Larue, holding out her hand for the ball again.

But Polly Marley, who had been unusually silent for her, jumped up so quickly that her spool of thread rolled down the steps.

"I've got the most wonderful idea!" she informed them, her dark brown eyes shining. "Nicer than anything we've ever done!"

Artie had started after the thread, but he turned to stare at his sister.

"Is it exciting?" he asked eagerly.

Polly's dark eyes were dancing and she looked as though she were bursting with news to tell. She could always, so she had once told her mother, talk better when she stood up, and she generally talked from the tops of steps and on tables, or some height that was handy.

"It's exciting," she said mysteriously, "and we've never done it before."

"What is it?" demanded Jess. "Did any one ever do it before?"

"I don't know whether they did or not," replied Polly. "But, anyway, we can do it our-

selves. Let's have a riddle club!" she ended, unable to keep the grand idea to herself one moment longer.

To her disappointment, the others merely looked at her. It was plainly to be seen that they did not understand. Polly was used to explaining, though she did not always realize that her plans and schemes, so clearly worked out in her own mind, would naturally be quite strange to those who had not thought of them. Polly was a quick thinker, and it was she who oftenest supplied the chums with new games and pastimes.

"We can have a riddle club," said Polly, the color coming into her cheeks and the words almost tumbling out of her mouth. "We'll meet once a week and have riddles—ask 'em, you know, and then tell the answers."

"But I don't know any riddles," protested Margy Williamson.

"Mother knows bushels and bushels of them," said her brother Fred quickly. "We'll ask her, Margy."

"I think it will be heaps of fun!" declared Jess Larue, always ready for something new. "Who'll we have belong to it, Polly?"

"Oh, just us," said Polly, waving her right hand with the thimble still on it, to include the group on the steps, "you, Jess, and Margy and

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Fred and Ward and Artie and me—we can have such fun!”

“I never heard of a riddle club,” said Artie, his blue eyes very earnest. “Will one riddle be enough, Polly?”

“No, it won’t,” answered Polly, smiling. “You’ll have to have a new riddle every single week, Artie Marley. You can’t do the way you did last term in school.”

That made the others laugh. Artie had learned a poem to recite in school early in the term and each time he had expected to be asked to recite it, something had happened. Once he had a bad cold and couldn’t speak clearly. Another time his teacher had been called away. Still another Friday afternoon visitors had come and had taken up the period with speeches of their own. So, for one reason or another, one “piece” had lasted Artie till almost the close of school in June. He thought it very fine that he had had to learn only one poem.

“When do we meet?” asked Margy Williamson, who was a most practical little girl.

“After school, of course,” planned Polly. “And I think Wednesday afternoon is a good time, don’t you? The washing and the ironing are out of the way.”

Polly had heard her mother say that when



asked to hold a club meeting at the house, and though Polly didn't know what washing and ironing had to do with such meetings she thought Wednesday must be an especially good day.

The next moment Jess Larue jumped up as though a bee had stung her.

"I know what we can do!" she cried joyfully. "We can hold the meetings in our barn! There's a room built up in one corner of the hayloft that Daddy told us we could have to play in. It's dandy and light and no one will tell us not to make too much noise."

"And we can go up the ladder and pull it up after us," suggested Artie. "Like the cave dwellers."

"All right, we will," said Polly happily. "That will be a wonderful place to hold meetings, Jess. You're sure your father won't mind?"

"He said we could have it," repeated Jess. Then she looked anxious.

"It's awfully dusty," she said slowly. "Ward and I were going to clean it up, but we haven't had time yet."

"We'll all help," promised Margy. "Let's have a regular clubroom with furniture in it."

"Where'll you get the furniture?" demanded Fred, Margy's twin. "And how can we carry it up into a hayloft?"

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Margy giggled. She and her brother seldom agreed on a plan at first, though they always did before they had finished arguing.

"I don't mean a piano and rugs and sofas, silly," she said now. "But we could have some chairs and a table—you have to have a table if you have a club, don't you, Polly?"

"Do you?" asked Polly. "Why?"

"To pound on, of course," replied Margy, as though any one should know that. "The president sits behind it and pounds on it."

"Who'll we have for president?" asked Artie, who had found the spool of thread by this time and was busily fitting the new sails on his boat.

"Polly—she thought of the club," said Jess instantly.

So Polly was unanimously elected president of the Riddle Club.

"I wish Ward would come," fretted Jess. "We could begin to fix the room right away. I don't see what makes him stay so long."

"Probably he's lost his breath and stopped to find it," chuckled Fred.

"I'll bet he's reading," said Artie. "I wish he'd read a riddle for me," he added.

"I'll find one for you, if you don't get it yourself," Polly promised.

"I know hundreds of riddles right now,"

boasted Fred. "But I don't see where we're going to get tables and things like that."

"I mean old ones," said his sister impatiently. "If each of us asks for an old chair, that will be six; and we won't need more than six, because there are only six members."

"Suppose we had company?" inquired Jess anxiously.

"Then the boys can stand up," said Margy, and that seemed to dispose of that question.

"I think we'd better get the room cleaned out before we talk about furniture," declared the sensible Polly. "I have to take my music lesson tomorrow afternoon, but the next day I could help."

"We'll all go over to your house, Jess, and pitch in after school," said Margy. "Day after tomorrow. I love to sweep and dust places like that."

And she did, too. Like many other little girls, Margy saw no "fun" in dusting the chairs and tables in her parlor, but she liked to make any place in which she expected to play, spandy neat. She did not call that work.

"Here comes Ward!" said Jess suddenly. "I wonder why he's running?"

Down the street came a short, fat lad, racing as though wild beasts were after him. He had curly, dark hair like Jess's, but his face was full

and round, while hers was rather thin and pointed.

"Ward must be in an awful hurry," said the puzzled Fred. "Hey, Ward Larue! you won't be able to talk!" he shouted.

The fat boy opened his mouth wide, and closed it. He was trying to tell them something, but not a word could they hear. Even when he had reached the foot of the steps and stood panting, leaning against the white post, he had no breath left with which to talk.

"Anything happen?" asked Margy Williamson curiously.

Ward made a frantic effort to speak. His face was crimson. He puffed out his cheeks. The children knew Ward lost his breath easily, but they had never seen him like this.

"Steamboat!" he gasped. "Steamboat!"

Then he managed to draw a deep breath, and this time he found he had the words.

"There's a steamboat on fire!" he cried. "On the river!"



## CHAPTER II

### THE FIRE

ALTHOUGH Jess had complained because she thought the River Bend fire department was in too great a hurry to put out a fire, she now discovered that was exactly the thing she most wished them to do.

"Where? Where?" she cried, hopping up and down with excitement. "Why doesn't the chemical company put it out, Ward?" she demanded of her brother.

"Come on!" commanded Fred Williamson, seizing his cap. "Everybody's going—hurry up!" And as the six boys and girls ran pell-mell down the street, he muttered to Ward Larue: "Where would a boat be on fire, except in the river?"

As Fred had said, every one was rushing for the river. Women came out of the houses, untying their aprons as they ran. Boys whirled past on bicycles or leaped over lawn hedges in their haste to make short cuts. One lad, pushing a baby car-

riage, came clattering down the street, the baby bouncing about among the pillows and apparently enjoying the race hugely.

"Fire!" screamed the boys. "Fire! Fire! Steamboat on fire!"

Polly looked over her shoulder as she ran. Jess was close behind her.

"It must be the *Fulton*," gasped Polly. "That's due at four-thirty. And mother was coming home on it!"

"Maybe it isn't the *Fulton*," said Jess hopefully.

But she knew, as well as Polly, that no other boat was due at that time.

The wharf was black with people when the children reached it. Practically the entire population of River Bend was assembled on the landing and the banks near by. They were gazing up the river.

"I see it!" cried Polly.

"Oh, look!" gasped Margy.

No need to say that, when the blazing boat was clearly to be seen. It lay, apparently motionless, headed downstream. The whole top deck seemed to be ablaze.

"Gee!" said Artie, staring. "I wonder what started it?"

"Is it the *Fulton*?" asked Polly miserably.

"Let's go ask your father, Jess. He must be down in the office."

But they could not get through the crowd to reach the office. Even as they tried to push their way through, a man came out and began pressing the people back.

"We've got to have the landing clear!" he kept saying. "Move back—we want this landing clear."

"I think——" said Polly, when she found that it would be impossible to reach the office and Mr. Larue just then, "I do think the fire is dying down."

Sure enough, the flames were flickering lower and lower. Black figures could be seen, hurrying about the deck and beating the blaze with brooms. A silver stream began to play on one of the stacks.

"That's the fire extinguisher!" said Ward Larue knowingly. "I'll bet they broke the doors and took the axes out, too. I wish I was on that boat!"

"Huh! if you had an axe about all you'd do would be to chop off your own foot," said Fred Williamson.

He was a year older than Ward and seldom allowed the younger boy to forget the difference in their ages.

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"It's worse!" cried Fred's twin. "Look! Oh, why don't they put it out!"

A murmur arose from the groups standing on the river banks. The orange and red flames had shot up again and this time they were as high as the stacks of the steamboat. But in a few moments the fire died down and this time the fighters had it under control. A cheer sounded as the water began to churn and the boat moved slowly.

"She's coming in!" shouted Ward. "That means the engine room is all right. Say, wasn't that an exciting fire? I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

Jess looked at her brother reproachfully.

"Polly thinks her mother is on the *Fulton*, Ward," she said. "It isn't much fun to watch a boat burning up if your mother is on board."

"Well, it didn't burn, did it?" asked Ward uncomfortably.

"Never mind, Ward," said Polly smilingly. "As long as no one was hurt, it's all right. And Mother may have waited for the late boat."

"We'll wait," declared Artie gravely. "We can walk home with her."

The *Fulton* came in very slowly. It seemed to the anxious watchers that the big steamboat never would dock.

At last the *Fulton* glided slowly up against the landing and was made fast. The gangplank was thrown out and the stream of passengers began to walk down.

"What hat did your mother wear, Polly?" asked Margy Williamson.

"The one with the blue feathers," replied Polly. "There she is—no, that is Mrs. Morris."

Of course the fire had frightened the passengers and the crew very much. They all looked white and worried and they seemed very glad to be safe in port. The *Fulton* did not show the effects of the fire as much as might have been expected. The rails of the upper deck were black and charred and some of the glass in the cabins had been smashed. But that was about all one could see.

"It must have been mostly inside," said Ward wisely. "Probably all the upper deck cabins are burned out inside."

He proved to be right. Ward really knew a good deal about the steamboats in his father's company, and he had often made the trip to Lake Bassing and back.

"Everybody is off," said Polly suddenly.

"Where do you suppose your mother is?" asked Jess, anxiously.

"I guess she waited for the late boat," an-

swered Polly. "I'm so glad she didn't see the fire."

"Well, we might as well go," said Ward, "they're unloading the freight now. I'm going to ask Daddy to let me go on board when he's not so busy."

"Why, Polly Marley, how long have you been here?" asked a high, cheerful voice, and Mrs. Morris smiled at the six, with whom she was well acquainted.

"Did you see your mother?" went on Mrs. Morris. "I only hope her nerves are better than mine. I'm afraid I'll have bad dreams about that fire for weeks to come."

"Was—was Mother on the boat?" stammered Polly.

"Yes, she got on at Bayport," answered Mrs. Morris briskly. "We were talking together half the way home. I don't see how you missed her."

Kindly Mrs. Morris hurried on to her own home and children, little dreaming of the worried young folk she left behind her.

Polly was the first to speak.

"I *know* she didn't get off that boat!" she declared positively. "I watched every single person. You don't suppose she jumped into the river to get away from the fire, do you?"



"No, she wouldn't do that," decided Jess. "Let's go down and make sure that every one is off."

They went down to the wharf, and Ward spoke to one of the men—a clerk who was checking off the freight piled high in barrels and boxes.

"Your father's talking on the long distance 'phone," said the clerk, writing as he talked. "You can't bother him now. Yes, every one is off the boat—I'm sure of that. The captain has been through, and all passengers are accounted for. Now for pity's sake, run along and don't ask another question."

There didn't seem to be anything to do, after that, but go home. Polly looked solemn, and Artie, who looked up to his sister, looked serious, too. Fred and Margy and Jess and Ward said little, but they were trying to puzzle out what could have become of Mrs. Marley.

"What are you going to do?" asked Jess, when they had walked a little way in silence.

"Wait for Daddy to come home and tell him," said Polly. "He won't be home till to-morrow morning—he's in Warren, buying stuff for the store."

Mr. Marley was the owner of the largest hardware store in River Bend, and his customers were

fond of saying that you could buy everything used in building a house or a barn in his store.

It was a sober little procession that walked down the street, away from the gleaming river. Polly Marley and Jess Larue were in the lead, their arms about each other. As they approached the Marley house, Jess glanced up.

"Polly!" she said in a queer voice. "Polly, your mother is sitting out on the porch!"

Artie gave a wild whoop—like a small but vigorous young Indian—and rushed for his mother. The others followed more slowly. Mrs. Marley sat in her usual chair, cool and calm and pretty as the children had always seen her.

"Why, you poor lambs!" she said, when she heard of their anxiety. "I never dreamed of anything like that. I decided to get off at Upper Landing and let Jake Simpson bring me home in his car. I wanted to stop at one of the farms and buy a few eggs. I didn't know the boat had been on fire—it must have caught after it left the Upper Landing."

Upper Landing was a stop above River Bend and was the point where the farmers came to ship their produce. River Bend people sometimes got off there and came the rest of the way by automobile, especially if they wished to stop at some farm and buy eggs and chickens and fresh vegetables.

You may be sure Polly and Artie were two of the happiest children in River Bend that night, and Polly was so glad to have her mother safe at home that she practiced two hours, instead of one, the next day, and had an extra good music lesson with her teacher. Polly was like that—when she was happy or thankful, she put her whole heart into some work and did amazingly well.

Two days after the steamboat fire the Riddle Club met after school to put the clubroom in order. The Larue barn was a delightful place for children, and many a splendid romp the six had had in it. Years before there had been horses in the stalls and harness in the harness-room and several wagons had stood on the main floor. But Mr. Larue kept no horses now, only a single automobile which did not require much space and no oats or hay at all.

The room he had told Jess and Ward they might have for a playroom, was built in the hay-loft and would hold the six comfortably with the chairs and perhaps a table—when they collected the furniture. It had a door and a padlock and a key, and Ward immediately took possession of the key. When the club members had climbed the ladder and pulled it up after them, they were certainly monarchs of all they surveyed.

"The first thing to do, is to clean out all this junk," announced Polly, waving her hand to draw their attention to the broken crates and the empty feed measures and baskets that were piled about the little room.

"Where shall we chuck 'em?" asked Ward helpfully.

"Put them out in the loft in a pile, and when we go down we'll take them," said Polly, who knew how to plan her work. "We don't want to mess up the whole barn while we're straightening this place."

Margy Williamson seized one of the old measures, intending to toss it out of the door. Instead she dropped it with a loud shriek and rushed through the door herself.

"The ladder!" she screamed, dancing about on the edge of the loft. "Let the ladder down, quick!"

"What's the matter?" cried Polly and Jess, running to her. "Did a spider bite you, Margy? What happened to you?"

"Ow!" shrieked Margy again, by way of answer. "Ow! There it goes!"

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW CLUB MEETS

FRED and Ward began to laugh, while kind little Artie went off to look in the shadowy corners, to see if he could find what had frightened Margy.

"What was it?" asked Polly. "What bit you?"

She was sure something had bitten Margy, and Jess was inclined to think so, too.

"It was a mouse!" cried Margy. "It was in that measure and it jumped out the minute I picked the measure up. O-oh, how I do hate mice!"

Ward and Fred rolled over on the hay with which the loft was littered and laughed to their hearts' content. But Jess and Polly did not think it funny.

"I can't stand mice, either," confided Polly. "I'm not exactly afraid of them, but they make me shiver."

The three girls went back to work, but they tapped gingerly on every box or basket before they picked it up. Artie privately thought Margy was



very silly to be afraid of a mouse, but he was too polite to say so. He had a pair of pet white mice, and he was very fond of them, though he had never been able to make his mother or Polly understand how intelligent and affectionate they were.

"There!" exclaimed General Polly, when the trash had been carried out of the room and put in a pile ready to be carried down. "Now I think we'd better sweep it."

"The window is awfully dirty," said Jess critically.

So it was. It had six small panes in each sash, and when it was open it had to be propped up with a small stick. The glass was covered with cobwebs and dust, and any housekeeper would have said at once that it needed washing.

"There's a pail and some cloths downstairs—Daddy keeps them to wash the car with," said Ward, "and we can get water from the pump. Come on, Fred, we'll do the window."

"Take some of the trash down with you," called Polly after them.

But the boys—Artie followed them—were too busy putting the ladder into position to pay any attention to making their "heads serve their heels" as Polly's grandmother was fond of saying.

While they were gone after the pail and cloths,

the three girls swept and dusted and brushed down the great gray cobwebs that hung like dusky lace from every corner. A crash and a burst of laughter brought them flying to the edge of the loft.

"We dropped the pail!" cried Fred, who was half way up the ladder. "One of the rungs cracked and that made me let go."

The water had splashed on Artie and Ward, but not enough to make them uncomfortable, and they filled the pail again and handed it up to Fred. This time it reached the clubroom safely, and the boys managed to wash the window fairly clean, though it is doubtful if the job would have been approved by their mothers. The glass was streaky and black finger prints adorned the painted work, but it was certainly an improvement over the original state of affairs.

"Mother gave me an old rug," announced Polly, when there seemed to be nothing more to clean, "and Jess has a table; so all we need are chairs. I think every one ought to bring one chair to the meeting to-morrow afternoon."

"I'd rather sit on a box," declared Fred.

"No, this is going to be a real club," insisted Polly. "We want the clubroom to look nice. You know that secret society they had in school one year—the one the boys in the graduating class had. They sat on planks put across soap boxes,

and when a meeting wasn't exciting enough, some one would knock one of the boxes over and let all the boys slide off on the floor. That's no way to do."

"But we wouldn't do that," protested Artie mildly.

"Yes, you would, if you had a box to knock," returned Jess, who thought she knew how boys acted, as perhaps she did.

"Well, we'll bring chairs, then," said Ward good-naturedly. "We've got plenty of old chairs up in our attic."

"I'll bet mother will let me have the patent rocker if I ask her," chimed in Fred.

His sister Margy shook her head.

"We don't want *rocking chairs!*" she informed him. "First place, there isn't any room to rock in, and, second place, it would look funny. I'll get you one of Aunt Jane's old chairs, Fred; she has some piled out in the woodshed."

"We'll have the first meeting to-morrow," planned Polly. "So every one come as soon as school is out and don't forget to bring a chair."

The next afternoon six children and six chairs were seen approaching the Larue barn. A stranger might have thought they were moving in to live in the barn, but it was merely the Riddle Club assembling for their first meeting.

It required much tugging and pulling, punctuated with shrieks of laughter, to get the six chairs safely up the ladder, and then it was discovered that Ward had forgotten the key.

"I left it in my sweater pocket," he explained. "You wait a minute and I'll go get it."

He scrambled down the ladder and dashed out of the barn. Three minutes passed. Then five. He did not come back.

"I'll go see what's the matter," offered Jess, and she, too, disappeared.

Another three minutes ticked past, told off on the watch of which Artie was so proud. Three minutes seems long when you are waiting for some one. Fred had just suggested that perhaps Mrs. Larue wouldn't let them come back, when Ward and Jess came running into the barn, quite out of breath.

"We thought you were never coming!" cried Margy, helping Polly hold the ladder steady as the brother and sister began the upward climb.

"Dora—was—making—doughnuts!" panted Ward, for he, like most fat folk, found rushing about hard work. "She said if I'd wait a minute, she would give us some."

"Yes—look!" exclaimed Jess, who had reached the haymow ahead of her brother.

She opened a paper bag she carried and showed

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them the brown doughnuts, still warm and, oh, so fragrant!

"Gee!" exclaimed Fred and Artie together, sniffing delightedly.

"Where's the key?" asked the practical Polly.

"I—I forgot it!" answered Ward, looking much astonished. "Funny, but Dora stopped me as I was going through the kitchen and I clean forgot the key. I'll go get it now."

This time he went around the kitchen and was back in a few moments, the key dangling from a piece of string in his hand. He opened the padlock and pushed open the door with a grand flourish.

"Oh, my!" cried the Riddle Club in a chorus.

At the window hung a plain white curtain, thin enough to let the light through but daintily crisp and spotless. A plain white deal table stood against the wall, and a blankbook and pencil lay on the well-scoured top.

"That's the table that used to be in the harness room," said Jess at once. "Daddy and one of the wharf men must have moved it up here last night."

"And mother put up the curtain," said Ward positively. "She's always putting up curtains."

It was the work of a few seconds to put down the square of brilliant rag rug that Polly's mother



had given her and arrange the six chairs about the table. Then the window was propped up on the handy stick—for it was warm in the barn—and a kind breeze blew the white curtains gently.

"Doesn't it look nice!" said Polly contentedly. "Ever so much nicer than if we had soap-box seats. Shall we have the meeting now or eat the doughnuts first?" she added, noticing that Artie's round blue eyes were fixed on the bag in Jess' lap.

"Eat first!" returned Fred, and the way those sugary brown doughnuts vanished was really amazing.

"Go ahead," murmured Ward, when the last crumb had disappeared.

Polly seemed a little confused.

"We have to decide a lot of things first," she explained, feeling that the others expected her to speak, because she had suggested the formation of the club. "We'll have to say when we're going to meet and what officers we want and how many riddles we're going to ask every time. Daddy says new organizations"—and Polly looked very proud as she pronounced the long word—"have pre—pre—what did he call it, Artie?" she appealed to Artie, who was something of a bookworm and had an excellent memory.

"Pre-liminary meeting," said Artie distinctly.

"Yes, that's it," nodded Polly. "This is one

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of 'em. Next time we'll have riddles and everything."

"How many officers shall we have?" asked Jess eagerly.

"I've brought one of mother's club programs with me," said Polly; "and I don't think we can get along with less than six."

"Six!" echoed Margy. "Why, there's only six of us."

"Well, that's all right," said Polly calmly. "We can each one be something. You can see for yourself that the River Bend Civic Club has more than six officers."

The Riddle Club members studied the white and blue card Polly passed to them intently. Yes, six officers were none too many according to that.

"Polly must be president," declared Margy, "because this is her idea. Besides, she can always think of something to do. Fred Williamson ought to be treasurer, because he is good in arithmetic."

"Then let Artie Marley be first vice-president," suggested Jess, "and you be secretary."

"What will you be?" asked Margy. "And Ward—he has to be something."

"We'll both be vice-presidents," said Jess complacently. "I'll be the second and Ward can be the third."

And that settled the selection of officers to every one's satisfaction.

"We'll have to have dues," announced the newly elected treasurer, quite as though he had been in office before.

"Dues?" repeated Ward. "What do we want dues for?"

The treasurer looked impatient.

"For expenses, of course," he replied.

"But we haven't any expenses," argued Ward. "Where are there any expenses?" and he looked around the room as though he expected to see expenses peeping at him from the knot holes.

"We may not have any now," admitted Fred, "but we shall have. Suppose we want something to eat? There won't be any money to buy it with."

"We ought to have badges or pins or something," broke in Polly. "Yes, I think we ought to have dues, too, Fred. How much do you think they should be?"

"Ten cents a month," replied Fred. "That will be sixty cents. I'll keep it in my tin bank."

No one had ten cents that afternoon, so the treasurer agreed to wait till the next meeting to collect.

"Let's have pins," urged Margy, who dearly loved jewelry. "We can wear them to school

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and let the other boys and girls guess what they stand for."

"But don't tell what the club is," said Polly quickly. "We'll keep it a secret. That will be fun."

"Pins cost a lot," declared Artie wisely. "We'd better have badges—a piece of ribbon with a question mark on it. Couldn't you girls sew something like that?"

Polly gazed at her brother with much respect.

"We could embroider a question mark, at least I could," she said, for she was a good little needlewoman for her age and had won a prize at the County Fair for neat sewing. "I'll make six badges."

Ward looked significantly at his sister.

"Isn't it time to tell about the prize now?" he asked anxiously.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SECRET THAT DIDN'T KEEP

POLLY and the others stared in surprise.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Fred curiously.

Jess twisted her handkerchief, a sign that she was perplexed.

"I wasn't going to say a thing about it—not till the next meeting," she said. "Ward never can keep a secret."

"Didn't know it was a secret," mumbled the abashed Ward.

"Well, of course it isn't," conceded Jess more kindly. "That is, not exactly."

"For pity's sake!" cried Fred, "what are you talking about?"

Polly and Margy, though they did not say anything, wondered, too. Jess glanced around the circle and seemed to make up her mind.

"I suppose I might as well tell you now," she said. "I thought it would be nice to wait till we had a regular meeting and told some riddles."



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"Is it a riddle?" asked Polly eagerly.

"No, not a riddle," replied Jess. "That is, not exactly."

Fred snorted. Jess could almost see him thinking, "Just like a girl!" his favorite comment when his sister or her friends displeased him.

"What about the prize?" prodded Margy.

"I'll tell you in a minute, if you'll give me a chance," said Jess. "Daddy heard Ward and me talking about the club and he said he thought we ought to get lots of fun out of it. And he said he has a riddle he's sure none of us can guess—at least not right away. He's going to give a dollar to the one who can solve it first."

"Hurrah!" shouted Fred, feeling his wait had been worth while. "Bet you I win it!"

Polly giggled and Margy flashed her brother a scornful glance.

"You haven't even heard it!" she reminded him. "What is the riddle, Jess? It must be awfully hard, if your father will give a dollar for the answer."

"He hasn't told us yet," said Jess importantly. "He's going to write it down so I can read it at the next meeting. And we have to hand the answers in like examination papers—you know, write it down and no one knows what any one else has written. Won't it be fun!"

"I'm going to ask Daddy to tell me all the riddles he knows," declared Artie. "I'll learn 'em all by heart, too."

Polly pounded on the table with the hammer she had brought, for they were all talking at once and the noise was tremendous. Polly thought the hammer didn't look as handsome as the ebony and silver gavel her mother used when she led the meetings of her club, but it had the advantage of making more noise.

"Every one must promise to get one or two riddles for the meeting next week," she said seriously. "Try to get two if you can. And get good ones—not silly ones that we all know, like 'What goes up and down and never touches sky or ground?' I've heard that one ever since I can remember."

"It's a pump handle," said Artie, rather glad to hear a riddle that he knew. Artie was a little worried about having to learn two riddles for one meeting.

"There goes the five o'clock whistle!" said Polly, as the landing whistle sounded shrilly. "We'd better stop now. Don't forget the riddles and don't lose the key, Ward."

Polly was an industrious little girl, and she started to make the club badges the following afternoon. She and Margy and Jess worked on

them, while the boys rigged up a contrivance that was to pull the hayloft ladder up and down.

"It will be like the moat in feudal castles," explained Artie, the bookworm. "I mean the draw-bridge that went over the moat."

Polly's mother had given her a yard of handsome dark blue ribbon and Polly cut this into six pieces exactly the same length. It wasn't easy to draw the question marks, but Polly persevered, and while Jess and Margy held the pieces of ribbon straight, Polly marked them with a piece of white chalk. She had three large needles and a ball of yellow wool, and she showed the other two girls how to outline the question mark. The yellow showed up beautifully against the dark blue ribbon.

"Why do we have a question mark?" asked Fred, when Polly proudly displayed the first finished badge. "Why don't you have an 'R' instead? 'R' is for 'Riddle,' you know."

"This club is going to be a secret," said Polly firmly, "and no one will be able to guess what the question mark means. Besides, riddles are questions, I guess, so it stands for the Riddle Club just as much as 'R' does."

"Anyway, you should have said that when we were talking about the badges yesterday," de-

clared Margy, stopping long enough to thread her needle again.

"And the ribbons are all marked, so they can't be changed," added Jess.

Fred wisely decided not to criticize any further, but to devote his skill and attention to the ladder. And perhaps it showed that girls are naturally a little kinder-hearted than their brothers, for the ladder wouldn't work at all, after the boys had spent an hour rigging it, and neither Polly nor Jess nor Margy laughed at them. They declared that the ladder was plenty good enough as it was, and Polly pointed out to Artie that they didn't need a drawbridge because there was no moat to cross.

The six club members wore their badges to school Monday morning, and, dear me, they hadn't been in the school yard five minutes before they were noticed!

"What's that pinned to your dress?" Carrie Pepper asked Polly curiously.

"It's a badge," answered Polly.

"But what's it for?" persisted Carrie. "Where did you get it? I never saw a sign like that—is it a figure 8?"

Poor Polly blushed. Her badge was one Jess had outlined, and Jess was not very clever with

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her needle. The question mark did look something like a figure 8.

"That," said Polly, with dignity, "is a question mark. And I can't tell you what it is for, because that is a secret."

Carrie flounced away and two seconds later discovered that Margy Williamson wore a badge like Polly's.

"What is that?" asked Carrie, hopeful of getting more information from Margy.

"My secret badge," returned Margy promptly. "I'm sorry I can't tell you about it, Carrie, but it is a dead secret."

Carrie was so anxious to hear more that she almost danced up and down.

"Does any one else know?" she asked craftily.

"Six people do," answered Margy.

"Boys or girls?"

"Both—and I won't tell you another word," said Margy hastily, beginning to be afraid that Carrie would surprise the secret on the tip of her tongue.

Then, before Carrie could investigate further, the bell rang and the children had to file into the schoolhouse.

"Six boys and girls belong to a secret club that Polly Marley and Margy Williamson got up,"

whispered Carrie to her chum, Stella Dorman, who sat across the aisle from her.

"Carrie Pepper, you may stay twenty minutes after school for whispering," said Miss Elliot, the teacher. And Carrie couldn't tell Stella any more just then.

"Stella," she ordered, as soon as the recess bell sounded, "you go around and count how many boys and girls you see wearing that dark blue badge with a red question mark on it. Some of the marks look like figure 8's—Polly's does. There ought to be six of them, and I want to know who belongs to the club."

Stella always did whatever Carrie told her to do, and she started off obediently to look for the badges. Before the ten-minute recess was over, she had counted the six.

"Artie Marley has one," she reported to Carrie, who checked off on her fingers as she listened. "And Fred and Margy Williamson and Jess and Ward Larue. And, oh, yes, Polly Marley."

"You might know!" commented Carrie. "They live so near each other, I suppose they tell each other everything."

She said no more about the club, and Stella supposed she had satisfied her curiosity. But Carrie was probably the most curious girl in the River Bend school and she was determined to find out



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everything she could about the new "secret society," as she called the club.

That night, after school, she was passing the third grade room and, looking in, she saw Artie Marley industriously cleaning the blackboards. This was a task Artie thoroughly enjoyed, because he had a wooden stool to stand on and because he could get as dusty and chalky as he chose and no one scolded him. He was having a beautiful time, rubbing off the afternoon writing lessons when Carrie called to him.

"Hello, Artie!" she said gaily. "My, you're raising a cloud of dust—it's a good thing Miss Carter went home."

"She wouldn't care," Artie answered, knocking the eraser against the desk so that clouds of chalk flew in every direction. "She wants the boards clean."

"What's that thing you're wearing?" asked Carrie, pointing to his badge.

Artie had pinned it to his shirt, for he had taken off his coat to work.

"That's our Riddle Club badge," explained Artie innocently. "Polly made it. The first meeting is to-morrow and I have to learn my riddles to-night."

"What do you do in a riddle club?" asked Carrie eagerly. "Just tell riddles?"

"Yes," nodded Artie, forgetting to rub his blackboard. "We tell riddles and Mr. Larue—Ward's father—has offered a dollar as a prize. He's going to give us a hard riddle to answer. You ought to see our clubroom—it's up in Ward's barn."

"There's Ward Larue, whistling for you now," said Carrie, looking through the window which opened on the school yard.

Artie gave one last fearful rub to the board, dusted his hands on his blouse, and put on his coat as he ran out to join Ward.

"What were you doing?" asked Ward impatiently. "I was whistling my head off for you."

"I was only telling Carrie Pepper about our Riddle Club," explained Artie.

"You told her?" gasped Ward, so surprised he "almost fell over," as he later reported to Jess. "You told her? Polly said this was a secret club!"

Artie remembered now what Polly had said, but it was too late.

"Oh, I forgot!" he cried. "She asked me, and I just told her. Do you suppose Polly will care?"

Ward said he didn't know, but whether she did or not, the club couldn't be a secret one any longer.

"Carrie Pepper will have it all over school by

to-morrow morning," he predicted. "That girl can't keep a thing to herself."

Ward and Artie were going down to the wharf because Ward wanted to ask his father about something. They found Mr. Larue at his desk in the crowded little office built on the landing, and he welcomed them by asking whether they had their riddles ready.

"Jess tells me the meetings start to-morrow," said Mr. Larue, smiling at Ward and Artie, "and I suppose something too terrible to contemplate will happen to a member who dares come without a good riddle up his sleeve."

"I'm going to learn two riddles to-night," declared Artie earnestly.

Ward said carelessly that he knew plenty of riddles.

"I've thought of something our clubroom needs, Daddy," he announced. "It's very important, and you said I could have one, but I'd rather have it out in the barn, I think."

## CHAPTER V

### WARD'S VISITORS

MR. LARUE laughed a little.

"Dear me," he said, "that sounds almost as though it might be a riddle. "What is it that you would rather have out in the barn, Ward?"

"The radio set," replied Ward. "It would be such fun to have one in our clubroom."

"I doubt if Mother would care to climb to the hayloft every time she wished to listen in," Mr. Larue said. "But, aside from that, Son, I haven't a radio set for you. They were supposed to come in on the *Fulton* and they didn't arrive. I suppose it is really lucky, because they might have been damaged by fire or water."

Ward and Artie walked slowly home, stopping to watch a baseball game going on in a vacant lot. When they reached the Larue house, they saw Margy Williamson and Polly coming down the steps.

"We've been going over our riddles," Polly explained, as she and Margy crossed the road with

Artie. "You want to be sure and learn one or two to-night, after supper, Artie."

"Oh, I will," promised Artie, and as soon as supper was over he took the riddle book his father gave him and went away by himself to study.

The riddle book was bound in blue and white gingham and Mr. Marley had used it when he was a boy. There were so many riddles in it that Artie, who liked to read, was tempted to read it straight through. But experience had taught him that if he once began to read a book, he left other tasks undone. So he resolutely selected two riddles that appealed to him and said them "over and over and backward" (which was his sister Polly's method of committing anything to memory) till he was sure he knew them "by heart."

Then he went in search of his family. He found them out on the porch, for the weather was just beginning to be pleasantly warm and to behave as late spring weather should behave.

"Wouldn't it be nice now if we had our radio set?" Polly suggested. "The Andersons have such fun with theirs almost every night."

"Well, you probably will not have long to wait," said Mr. Marley, as Artie perched on the arm of his chair. "I expected to have an order in before this; and as soon as the steamboat company brings in the sets, you shall have one."

Mr. Marley, you see, sold radio sets in his store, but he had had difficulty in getting supplies, and many River Bend homes had had to wait for sets ordered months before.

"Mr. Larue said he expected the radio sets to come in on the *Fulton*, Daddy," said Artie, recalling what Ward's father had said that afternoon. "But they didn't, and Mr. Larue thinks it is lucky, for the fire might have damaged them."

"Yes, that's true," agreed Mr. Marley. "We'll have to exercise our patience a little longer, if that's the case."

The first meeting of the Riddle Club had been set for the next afternoon, but like many another important event, it had to be postponed. Margy Williamson was the innocent cause. Margy had a great fondness for sweet things, and, alas, she had not yet learned that too much cake and candy were not good for her. So the very evening when Artie was industriously learning his riddles, Margy, rummaging around on the top shelf of a closet for something she wanted, found a box of chocolates her mother had hidden there.

Miss Margy had had two pieces of chocolate cake for supper that evening, but her sweet tooth was far from satisfied. She put the box of candy



under her pillow, and that night, after every one was asleep, she ate a whole pound of rich, sweet chocolates. Of course she was ill before morning and frightened her poor mother and roused the whole family. She couldn't go to school the next day, but had to stay quietly in bed.

Her brother Fred brought the news to school.

"Margy's sick," he said briefly. "She ate all the candy."

Polly thought of the Riddle Club.

"Then we can't have the meeting this afternoon," she said. "Let's wait till to-morrow. Margy will be well to-morrow, won't she?" she asked Fred.

"I guess so—if she doesn't find another box of chocolates and gobble them up," replied Fred. He was put out because he had not had any of the candy.

Margy was sorry to think she had spoiled the club's first meeting, but she was glad she need not miss it. She thought that Polly was very kind to wait for her, and Mrs. Williamson thought so, too.

As there was no club meeting to attend that afternoon, Polly and Jess thought they might as well try to learn to knit. They stopped at Margy's house to ask how she was and her mother told them she was asleep. Then they went over to the

Marley's side porch and settled down contentedly with their long needles. But Fred and Artie were not interested in knitting.

"Where's Ward?" they asked Jess. "He didn't wait for us after school."

"He's in the barn," replied Jess. "He said he was going to do some special work. I suppose he had an idea."

Ward was always having ideas. The other children were used to them. Sometimes the ideas were funny and sometimes they were useful and once or twice Ward had had ideas that got him into hot water. But in the main, his ideas interested him more than they did any one else and kept him busy.

"Let's go over," suggested Artie, and he and Fred went across to the Larue barn.

They had expected to find Ward busy in the clubroom, but instead they heard loud voices as they approached the door.

"Get up!" some one was saying. "Get up! Get up!"

"That's Ward," whispered Artie, his blue eyes dancing. "Sounds as though he had a mule in there."

Fred grinned. It did sound as though Ward were trying to get an obstinate mule or horse upon its feet.

"Get up!" his voice began again. "Get up! Get up! Get up, I tell you!"

Artie and Fred pushed against the sliding door and it rolled back with a creaking of rusty catches. The afternoon sunshine streamed into the old barn, lighting up the dusty corners. Ward stood under the hayloft, looking down at something.

"Hey, Ward!" Fred called to him. "What's the matter?"

Ward turned. His good-natured face was red with anger and he was panting. Ward lost his breath whenever he needed it most, as Polly Marley had once observed.

"I can't make 'em get up!" he choked.

Artie and Fred ran across the floor and joined him. Then they saw what the trouble was. Two tramps lay on a mound of hay which they had evidently swept up from the floor.

They were about as ugly, dirty and ragged-looking a pair as could be found in a day's journey. One had stiff, wiry hair that stuck up in tufts through the holes in his battered felt hat. The other wore no hat, while his oily hair was plastered so low on his forehead that it nearly touched his eyes. They were lying close together and apparently were sound asleep.

"Look at 'em!" cried the indignant Ward.

"I saw them as soon as I came in the barn. I suppose they've been here all night."

"Can't you make them move?" asked Fred, though Ward had just told him that he could not.

Artie was staring at the tramps solemnly, and now he suggested a plan.

"I read in a book once," he submitted, "that a man had a balky horse and he couldn't make it budge. It stopped right in the middle of the street once, and no one could pull it backward or forward. And a man who had once owned a balky horse happened to come past and he said to build a fire under the horse."

"Did he?" asked the interested Ward.

"Yes, and it galloped!" cried Artie triumphantly. "Why don't you build a fire under these tramps, Ward?"

"Because," returned Ward gloomily, "I'd be likely to burn the barn down."

Artie had not thought of that. He admitted it might be best to try some other plan first.

"If we all got together and *yanked*," said Fred, "I think we could pull them to the door. One at a time, you know."

"Yes, we could do that. Or if we had a barrel we could put them in it and roll them out," said Ward.

The tramp who wore a hat sat up with a jerk.

"I might have something to say about that, young feller," he remarked, in a hoarse voice.

"You get up," said Ward severely, "and get out of this barn."

The tramp rolled over on the hay again.

"Try and put me out," he grunted, and closed his eyes.

Outside a clear, cheerful whistle sounded.

"Daddy!" cried Ward joyfully. "He'll put 'em out. Run, Artie, and tell him to hurry."

Though Artie ran at top speed, the tramps were quicker. They leaped to their feet and sped through the back door of the barn as though Mr. Larue were already after them. The back door of the barn opened on a stretch of grass hemmed in by a picket fence. This fence the tramps scrambled over, leaving long pieces of their ragged coats behind, and away they ran up the street and were out of sight before Mr. Larue could get a glimpse of them.

"Don't say anything to the girls about this," he said, when he had heard the story. "I'll have locks put on the doors and see to it that they are fastened each night. If the girls heard about the tramps it might frighten them, or at least destroy their pleasure in the clubroom."

Ward and Fred and Artie went upstairs to see if everything was all right in the clubroom. They found that the padlock had not been disturbed and the room was exactly as they had left it. Indeed the tramps had probably gone into the barn to sleep and not with the intention of doing any damage.

"But there is always danger that such men will smoke and set the place afire," Mr. Larue said. "So it won't do any harm to have a couple of good, stout locks put on the doors."

He went on to the house while the boys lingered. Ward explained that he had meant to make a window screen for the window, but he supposed he would have to wait till another day for he had promised his mother to go to the store for her at half-past four.

"Polly doesn't like flies in the house," said Ward, "and I don't think she'll like them in the barn, either. I can make a good screen, when I have the time. I have a lot of wire Daddy said I could have. It's off the old screens we had on the porch last year. I have to go to the store now."

"We'll go to the store with you," offered Fred.

"Then come on, till I find out what Mother wants," said Ward, locking the clubroom door.



Ward's mother saw the boys coming and called to them that she would be out with her grocery list in a moment or two.

"Sit down on the porch and wait and I'll be there in a jiffy," she told them.

Ward and Fred and Artie sat down on the steps and waited. The back porch of the Larue house was wide and the kitchen opened on it. Through the open windows they could hear the deep voice of Mr. Larue talking earnestly, while Mrs. Larue's light steps sounded as she went back and forth between the stove and the kitchen table. She was baking.

"But what is making me more trouble than anything else, Amy," the boys heard Mr. Larue say presently, "is the mix-up about the radio sets."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MISSING RADIO SETS

ARTIE and Ward perked up their ears. Say "radio set" to them and they were immediately interested.

"A mix-up?" came in Mrs. Larue's pleasant voice. "What do you mean, Mortimer, by a mix-up?"

"I thought the sets hadn't been shipped. You know, I told you that after the fire on the *Fulton*," explained Mr. Larue. "I told Art Marley the same thing. He's been waiting patiently for weeks to fill his orders."

"Yes, I know," murmured Mrs. Larue.

"Well, the morning after the fire—no, not so soon, but not long after, anyway," went on Mr. Larue, "I received the invoice for twenty sets and a lot of material. They had been sent on the *Fulton* after all."

Artie and Ward stared at each other while Fred whistled softly. Where were the radio sets then?

This same question puzzled Mrs. Larue.

"They never reached the wharf, did they, dear?" she asked her husband.

"That's what we're trying to find out," responded Mr. Larue. "I certainly haven't them checked and neither have the men. There is a possibility that some of Marley's men took them from the dock—the cases would be addressed to him, you know. But I've telephoned him and he says he hasn't seen as much as a single copper wire."

Mrs. Larue opened and shut the oven door sharply.

"Some of the men from the hardware store might have taken the stuff and kept it," she said.

The boys heard Mr. Larue chuckle.

"Just what Marley told me about my men," he answered. "No, I wouldn't accuse any one of deliberately making off with the material. What I do think is that, in the general confusion after the fire and the docking of the *Fulton*, some of Marley's clerks lugged off the radio equipment and put it in the cellar without mentioning it. That young Kelper has been at home sick for a couple of weeks, I hear; Marley ought to ask him."

Mrs. Larue came out just then with the grocery list and a plate of freshly-baked sugar cookies to

pay the boys for waiting, she said. As they munched the cookies on their way to the store—they lived some little distance from “downtown” where all the stores in River Bend were located on one long main street—they discussed the mystery of the radio sets.

“My father,” declared Artie seriously, “is a very careful man. If those sets were in his store cellar, he’d know it.”

“So is my father careful,” retorted Ward. “You have to be careful when you’re checking freight shipments. He’s never lost a thing—I’ve often heard him say so.”

Fred Williamson suggested that perhaps no one was to blame.

“Perhaps they mailed that invoice ahead of time,” he said. “They do that sometimes, and then the stuff gets held up in the shipping room. I’ll bet that’s what happened to the radio sets.”

Fred was older than either Ward or Artie and they were inclined to respect his opinions. So it was decided that some shipping clerk at the factory had made a mistake, and the trip to the store and back was concluded amiably.

But at the supper table that night, Artie, mentioning Fred’s solution of the puzzle, learned that his daddy and Mr. Larue had made a discovery.

“I don’t know how you children get hold of

everything," said Mr. Marley, a little vexed. "I certainly have never mentioned any trouble about this radio business to any one except your mother. Outside of the shop, of course."

"We were waiting on the Larue's back porch," answered Artie, his honest blue eyes more earnest than ever. "Waiting to go to the store with Ward, Daddy. His mother asked us to wait. And Mr. Larue was telling her about the radio sets."

"I see," said Mr. Marley. "Then, as you know half of the story, you might as well hear the rest. Though I prefer that you don't talk about this in school," he added.

Artie and Polly nodded. Artie had told Polly before supper about the missing shipment and she was as interested as he was.

"Mr. Larue found out, late this afternoon, that the radio sets and the extra material were delivered to him," said Mr. Marley impressively. "That is, the stuff reached the dock. Then it disappeared."

Polly stared and Artie blinked.

"But, Arthur," cried pretty Mrs. Marley, "how could it disappear?"

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

"It was delivered," he repeated. "One of the dock hands on the *Fulton* has been laid up with

burns since the fire—badly scorched hands, I believe. He reported to the office shortly before five o'clock this afternoon and Larue just happened to mention to him that we were having trouble over these sets. The man told him that he had carried the radio equipment off the *Fulton* himself and piled the boxes on the wharf. Then, it seems, he fainted and was taken home without having checked up."

Polly opened her mouth to speak, but her mother asked the question first.

"If they were on the dock, why didn't Mr. Larue or some of his men see them?" she asked. "Twenty boxes couldn't walk away by themselves."

"I suppose you have piano packing cases in mind," replied Mr. Marley good-naturedly. "Before a radio set is assembled, it doesn't take up much space. Some of the little, cheap sets could go in your handkerchief box."

"Did—did somebody take them?" questioned Polly anxiously.

"It begins to look that way," admitted her father.

"Then we haven't any radio set," observed Artie sadly.

"Not yet," replied Mr. Marley. "Of course another shipment will be made as soon as pos-



sible. You'll have to be patient a little longer."

"This has been an unlucky day," remarked Artie. "First Margy gets sick and we can't have the Riddle Club; then——" he stopped, for he had been about to say that tramps had slept in the Larue barn—"then some one steals the radio sets," he finished instead.

The next morning in school Ward and Jess appeared unusually serious. They were a happy-go-lucky pair as a rule, and sometimes could not help laughing "out of time and place," as their teachers told them. But this morning they were quiet enough to please even the most exacting teacher.

It was Jess who whispered the reason to Polly at recess.

"You've heard about the radio sets?" she asked, and when Polly nodded, Jess whispered again.

"They were worth a thousand dollars!" she cried. "And some one stole them and my father has to pay for them just the same."

"My goodness!" gasped Polly. "How dreadful! A thousand dollars is a lot of money, isn't it?"

Jess said it was.

"And, you see, we don't know who did the stealing," she explained. "If we did, we could get them back."

Though Polly was as sympathetic as she could be, she did not know who had "done the stealing," either. But Fred, who heard about it through Margy, for Jess told both her chums before Ward had a chance to tell any one, had a plan.

"The way to find out," he announced, "is to watch the people who get new radio sets. The minute you hear any one has a new set, you tell your father and he can go and look at it and if it is his, he can take it back. That ought to be easy."

The members of the Riddle Club had a conference, and all agreed to keep their ears and eyes open for news of radio sets installed in River Bend homes. And Fred's plan might have worked beautifully and solved the mystery, except for one thing: There were no new sets installed. The people who had ordered sets through Mr. Marley waited for another shipment, just as the Larue and Marley families were doing. Fred thought that they were afraid to put in the stolen sets, but as the days went by and the six young detectives were unable to report a single new set discovered in any home, gradually Fred had to acknowledge that his theory was wrong. Wherever the stolen sets were, they were not in the parlors of River Bend people.

"It's a good thing we have the meeting to-

day," said Polly to Margy as they waited for Jess after school that afternoon. "Jess needs to be cheered up."

"So do I," declared Margy, who had recovered from her illness enough to come to school but who still looked pale.

Polly did not look as though she needed cheering. Her dark eyes were snapping and her straight, dark hair shone as though she had just brushed it. Polly had the happy faculty of looking as neat at the close of school as when the session began. Jess often wondered how she could. Jess herself was sure to have a dirty face and a middy tie anywhere but where it should be.

The three girls found the boys waiting them in the Larue barn. Ward had been up and unlocked the door and Fred had raised the window. The room was clean and cool with a welcome breeze coming in the window.

Polly stood up behind the table and called the meeting to order. She had been to one or two sessions of her mother's club and she recalled some of the grown-up phrases used there.

"We'll have the business meeting before the program of the afternoon," she said sedately.

"What's the program?" asked Artie.

"The riddles, of course—don't be silly," replied Jess.

"I don't think you should all talk at once," reproved President Polly doubtfully. "But I don't suppose I can stop you," she added. "Let me see, what comes under the head of business?"

"Dues!" cried Fred, leaping to his feet. "Did every one bring ten cents? I have the bank right here."

Fortunately each one had remembered to bring ten cents, for it would have been most embarrassing to have had Fred thrust that tin bank in one's face and not be able to drop the required dime in. When he had the sixty cents safely banked, Fred rattled it contentedly.

"I think we ought to decide how often we intend to meet," suggested Polly. "Mother thinks once a week is too often. She says we'll not get tired of the club if we don't have so many meetings."

"Well, I did think it was going to be a secret club," remarked Margy, glaring at poor Artie. "But if every one knows about it, we needn't meet so often."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Fred.

"No one will get excited over our meetings," explained his sister. "It would be some fun to meet every week and have the whole school guessing. But now they know it is a riddle club."

"Let 'em know," said Ward. "I say once in three weeks is about right for meetings. Then we won't have to learn so many riddles," he added.

Polly laughed. She knew that argument would appeal to Artie.

"Very well, then," said she. "We'll meet every three weeks. Is there any more business to be trans—transacted?"

Dead silence seemed to indicate that there was none.

"Now," said Polly, "we'll begin to ask our riddles. Who wants to be first?"

Artie waved his hand as he did in school when he wanted to speak.

"I think I'm forgetting mine," he declared anxiously. "So perhaps I'd better ask them right away."

"Go ahead," Fred encouraged him, and Artie stood up.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST SESSION

ARTIE cleared his throat. Clearly, he thought he was about to make a recitation.

"Fly paper is best for kites," he informed his audience.

The other children stared. Then Ward giggled.

"What in the world!" said the astonished Polly. "That isn't any riddle, Artie."

"'Tis, too," her brother insisted. "Daddy told me that one. I guess he knows riddles, Polly Marley."

"Then you haven't said it the right way," said Polly.

"Tell it to us again," suggested Jess.

"What is the best paper for kites?" asked Artie patiently.

The others shouted with laughter, while he looked perplexed. He wasn't fond of being laughed at, though when it comes to that, very few people take kindly to being regarded as a joke.



"That isn't the way you told it to us the first time," gasped Fred, wiping his eyes.

"You can't guess it!" challenged the indignant Artie. "That's the trouble with you—you can't guess my riddle."

"Fly paper!" shouted Ward.

Polly was sorry she had laughed at Artie.

"You told us, Artie," she said gently. "You really did. You must have been excited, I guess, for, instead of asking your riddle, you said, 'Fly paper is best for kites.'"

Then Artie had to laugh, too, and the more he thought it over, the harder he laughed.

"Next time," he declared, "I won't learn the answers—only the riddles. I thought so much about remembering the answer that I told that first."

He had another riddle to tell, and though Polly suggested that he wait and let the others have their turns, Artie was so afraid he would forget that one, or "mix it up," he said, that it was decided to let him get it off his mind immediately.

Artie stood up again. This time he talked so slowly, lest he make a mistake, that Fred complained he was going to sleep.

"I am not!" flared Artie. "I'm only taking pains."

And as he had to go back to the beginning again, no one interrupted him a second time, but waited respectfully for him to finish.

"Why is a cherry like a book?" asked Artie.

"Because it grows on a tree," said Ward hopefully.

"Books don't grow on trees," declared Jess.

"Cherries do," insisted Ward.

Polly wasn't guessing because she knew the answer. She waited quietly while the others tried to give the answer.

"Because it is pressed," said Fred, sure that he had it.

"Are books pressed?" asked Artie doubtfully.

"Of course they are," answered Fred, who wasn't at all sure. "They press 'em to make them flat. And my mother presses cherries to make jam. So there!"

"That isn't the answer," insisted Artie.

"A cherry is like a book because it is red," said Margy clearly.

"The cherries are green now," Jess reminded her.

"And I guess some books aren't read—s'pose it was written in—in Greek!" suggested Ward.

"Some one would read it," Artie assured him. "Anyway, Margy has it right. That's the answer."

Artie sat down, much relieved to think his exertions were over, and Polly arose.

"Don't you think," she asked tactfully, "that it would be better if we asked a riddle and allowed each one a guess in turn? That will give us more time to think and we won't try to get ahead of each other."

"Yes," agreed Jess instantly. "Let's do that. Every one have a guess and no one to interrupt."

"You ask a riddle next, Margy," said Polly, with a smile.

Margy seemed confident. She had a hard riddle, she announced.

"What is that which if you name it even you break it?" she asked.

It was Ward's turn to guess, following the new plan.

"Dishes," he said desperately, determined to make an effort.

"Wrong," replied Margy triumphantly. "You're next, Polly."

"Silence," said Polly.

Artie jumped a little. That was what his teacher said in school when she wanted perfect quiet in the room.

"How did you know?" asked Margy, surprised.

"Well, I heard one something like it," explained

Polly honestly. "It was, 'What can fall but doesn't break?' and 'silence' was the answer to that."

"If you name it do you break it?" asked Ward, puzzled.

"Why, yes," replied Margy. "If you name it you speak, and if you speak you break your silence—don't you see?"

Ward saw. Also he said he thought some riddles were very hard.

"Well, it is your turn," Polly informed him. "Tell us what you think is the right kind of a riddle."

Ward put his hands in his pockets and grinned.

"Why is a dirty tramp like a piece of flannel?" he asked teasingly.

Fred and Artie looked startled, while Margy and Jess and Polly put their wits to work.

"Because they are both fuzzy," ventured Jess.

"Fuzzy!" repeated Polly. "How are they fuzzy?"

"Well, you've seen flannel with that little fine fuzz on it, haven't you?" said Jess. "And tramps always look woolly and hairy and—and fuzzy!" she concluded.

"Because neither one works," guessed Margy.

"They're both seen a great deal," said Polly, with some truth.

"You're all wrong," said Ward. "Guess, Fred?"

"Give it up," answered Fred, and Artie, too, shook his head.

"Huh, that was easy," declared Ward. "They both shrink from washing."

"Flannel shrinks, if you put it in hot water," admitted Polly, "but I don't know about tramps."

"They shrink, too," declared Fred. "We saw some——" he stopped, warned by a gesture from Ward.

"You tell one, Polly," said Jess now.

"I'll save mine till toward the last," Polly replied. "Let Fred give us one."

Fred had a slip of paper in his hand. He took a hasty look at it.

"Which of the birds can lift the heaviest weight?" he demanded.

"Eagle," said Artie quickly.

"'Tisn't your turn and that isn't the right answer, anyway," retorted Fred. "Come on, Ward, guess it, can't you?"

"The turkey buzzard," drawled Ward.

"You're not giving riddle answers," protested Polly. "You have to think a little first. Now, do try!"

"All right, I've thought," announced Jess. "The answer is 'roc.'"

"A rock isn't a bird," said Fred, in disgust. "A rock is a stone."

"There is a roc bird," declared Jess. "I read about it in a book we have, and there was a picture, too, Fred Williamson."

"The bird Jess means is spelled r-o-c," said peacemaker Polly.

"All right, but I never heard of it," conceded Fred. "Your turn, Margy."

Margy couldn't guess and Polly confessed that she had to give up also.

"A crane!" chuckled Fred. "Thought you wouldn't guess that."

"I don't think a crane is such a strong bird," complained Margy, and the boys who understood such things, had to explain the piece of machinery that is called a crane to her.

Then it was Polly's turn.

"Mother told us this one," she said, smiling. "What is that which you can not hold for five minutes, though it is as light as a feather?"

Jess thought she knew.

"A hot thimble," said she.

That wasn't right.

"A piece of ice," said Artie, going to the other extreme.

"Your breath," answered Ward, and that was right.



"I've heard that before," he remarked. "My Uncle Ed used to tease me by asking me that when I was little."

"Now, Jess," said Polly, with an affectionate glance at her friend.

Jess had to think a moment. She had nearly forgotten her riddle.

"What is it that has four legs and only one foot?" she asked them.

The guesses came wildly. Margie was sure the answer was "a weather vane," though pressed for a reason, she couldn't give one.

Ward thought it must be a ruler and Polly hazarded the answer, "something in arithmetic."

"There are feet in some examples," she insisted.

Fred could not see why his answer, "a freak chicken" shouldn't satisfy Jess.

"I saw one at the fair," he kept insisting, "and so did Ward."

But the quiet Artie it was who managed to cover himself with glory.

"I know what has four legs and only one foot," he announced, coming out of a brown study. "A bedstead."

Jess's astonishment was hardly flattering.

"How in the world did you guess it?" she cried.  
"How did you know that was the answer?"

"Because a bedstead *has* four legs and only one foot," maintained Artie. And that was his answer.

"I'm afraid we won't have time to give any more," said Polly apologetically, when the excitement had subsided. "I'm sorry Artie gave his two and the rest of you only one apiece, but we've taken more time guessing than I thought we would."

"The riddles will do for next time," declared Jess.

"If we don't forget them," added Ward.

"I'll have to learn some more," mourned Artie.

Fred rattled the bank gaily.

"Anyway, we have sixty cents," he chortled.

"And no expenses," he added, like a good treasurer.

Polly pounded gently on the table with her hammer.

"The meeting isn't over yet," she warned them.

"You will please come to order. Jess is going to read us the riddle her father wrote."

"He didn't write it," said Jess. "He says it is a very old one. And hard to guess."

"I meant he wrote it down for you to read," replied Polly, beginning to think that the position as president of the Riddle Club required a good deal of patience.

"Jess is to read it aloud to us," Polly went on. "And if you think you can't remember it, write it down as soon as you get home. The answers are to be written out and handed in in sealed envelopes at the next meeting, three weeks from to-day."

"And Daddy will give a dollar to whoever solves it, without help," said Jess, feeling in the pocket of her middy blouse. "Maybe I've lost it, though," she finished calmly.

## CHAPTER VIII

### KNIGHTS AND LADIES

"JESS LARUE! Don't tell us you've lost that riddle," scolded Margy Williamson. "Have you looked in your pocket carefully?"

"Yes, I have; and it isn't there," said Jess. "But Ward can run down to the wharf and ask Daddy what it was."

"Can't you remember it?" asked Polly hopefully.

"I never heard it," was the answer. "Daddy wrote it down and gave it to me at lunch this noon. He said not to read it."

"There's Ward," suggested Margy. "He has plenty of pockets. Maybe it is in one of his."

Ward obligingly turned out his pockets. There was about everything in them one could wish for—except the missing slip of paper with the prize riddle on it.

"Haven't you changed your blouse?" asked Polly. "That isn't the one you wore in school."

Jess jumped to her feet and ran to the door.

"Mother made me take the other one off when I came home this afternoon," she cried. "It was ripped on the shoulder. I'll be back in a minute."

She scrambled down the ladder and fled into the house. In a few minutes she was back, the paper in her hand.

"Left it in the pocket!" she panted.

She need not have hurried so wildly, for it was several moments longer before she regained her breath. Then she read the riddle.

"What word is that," read Jess, "which, by changing a single letter, becomes its own opposite?"

"Read it again," said Polly, in despair. "I don't even understand it."

Jess read it again and blank faces greeted her effort.

"I don't believe I'll ever guess it myself," confessed Jess. "But Daddy says the answer isn't too difficult to be fair. Lend me your pencil, will you, Polly? Artie can have the slip."

She very generously passed the paper to Artie, after copying the riddle, and Artie stuffed it in his pocket. For a brief space the pencil was in great demand as the club members copied the riddle, each resolving to do nothing else until the answer was his and the dollar as good as won.

"I think a riddle club is heaps of fun," said

Polly happily, as she shut down the window and Artie and Ward put back the chairs.

It was necessary to put back the chairs before the club could disband, owing to the lack of room.

"I wonder who will win the prize?" pondered Margy, following Jess down the ladder.

"Maybe no one will," said Fred. "We don't have to give your father a dollar if we can't solve it, do we?"

Jess laughed merrily at that idea and shook her head.

"Fred is thinking the sixty cents wouldn't go far, if he had to pay it out like that," said Polly.

Although Mr. Larue had said the riddle was to be solved without help, it was natural the club members should talk it over, and the word "riddle" was so often on the tips of their tongues that Mrs. Marley declared she was sure they asked riddles in their sleep.

"I went into Artie's room last night," she said, one morning at the breakfast table, "and he sat up in bed and asked me 'Why is a cherry like a shoe button?' and when I told him to lie down and go to sleep he told me it was round!"

Artie and Polly laughed at this, though Artie only half believed it. He said he didn't remember saying a word. His mother told him he had been talking in his sleep.



The members of the Riddle Club didn't dislike school—indeed, they liked it as well as the more studious children, but it must be confessed they had their best times after school hours. Artie once told his mother why this was.

"We're together then," he said. "In school Ward and I are in the same class, but Polly is 'way up and Margy and Fred are in a different room, too. And we like to play the same things, 'most always. At school some one is forever wanting to play something else."

"I'm very glad you six like to play together," Mrs. Marley had replied. "Six children are a group in themselves, and you have these two big yards for a playground, with the Larue yard and barn across the street and I never have to worry about you."

Although they often played in the Larue barn, after the formation of the club, they were scrupulously careful not to enter the clubroom. The door was kept locked and not one of the members would go in it till the day for the next meeting rolled around. They played in the hayloft, though, and it was there, to please Artie, that they staged a play called "The Beleaguered Knight."

"He's attacked by enemies," explained Artie,

"and he draws up the drawbridge of his castle and they can't cross the moat."

"Suppose the enemy gets there before he can draw it up?" suggested Fred.

"Then he is captured, of course," admitted Artie.

"Do you want to be the knight?" asked Fred, and when Artie said he would like to, Fred said he must be the enemy.

"You'll have to have help, though," he pointed out to Artie. "Didn't the knights have some one to live in their castles?"

"Fair ladies," replied Artie, drawing on his reading, though the moat had made a greater impression on his mind than the pictures of beautiful princesses.

"Polly, don't you want to be a fair lady?" wheedled Fred. "Ward will make a good enemy—he's so fat."

Ward took this good-naturedly, and as Polly was willing to be a fair lady and Margy insisted she must be and Jess didn't object to joining the ranks of the enemy, that much was settled.

"The thing for us to do," Artie explained to his fair ladies, when they had climbed up to the loft with him, "is to pull up the ladder as soon as we see the enemy coming, or even hear them."

"Why not pull it up and tie it all the time?" asked Margy. "Then they never could get in."

"Well, I'm not sure, but I think the drawbridge has to be down part of the time," returned Artie. "You see, if the King should decide to come—or some one like that—he might not like it if the bridge wasn't down."

"Yes, and the grocery wagons and the laundry have to come over the bridge to reach the castle," added the literal-minded Margy.

Fred took his "men" aside and gave them secret instructions.

"We must manage to get into the barn without the folks in the castle seeing us," he whispered. "If we can creep in and two of you hold the ladder while I go up it, we can make them surrender."

"Sometimes the dust in the hay makes me sneeze," said Jess honestly.

"You mustn't let it," Fred told her sternly. "If you feel that you are going to sneeze, go back till you have sneezed somewhere where Artie can't hear you."

"But who will help Ward hold the ladder?" Jess inquired.

"I'd rather not have any one hold the ladder than to have you sneeze and give us away," Fred

declared. "The success of our expedition depends on perfect quiet," he hissed as impressively as he could.

Up in the loft the knight and his fair ladies waited while the enemy retreated to the yard. It was surprising how full of strange noises and creaks that old barn proved to be as soon as one began to listen. A bird flying against a window made Margy jump.

"The trouble is," complained Artie, "I can't see under the loft. If you could hold me by the feet, I'd swing over the edge."

"Yes, and if we dropped you, you'd land on your head," returned Polly, with sisterly good sense. "The only thing to do is to stay near the ladder and watch."

Artie said that they might stay near the ladder, but it wouldn't be fair to touch it till the attack. At that Margy sat down, insisting she could get to her feet the instant she was needed.

The knight and his fair ladies began to think the enemy had gone to sleep, but in reality they had gone around to the back of the barn and were planning to come in one of the windows and creep up to the ladder under the loft. They succeeded in getting almost to the ladder when Jess appeared to be suffering greatly. Her face was crimson and she waved her hands madly.

"What's the matter?" whispered Fred in alarm.

Jess only rolled her eyes.

"Can't you speak?" he asked her.

Jess shook her head, tugged at the handkerchief in her pocket, and, turning, fled the way she had come. She was barely through the window when a tremendous sneeze shook her.

"Gee!" Fred and Ward had followed her and Fred was staring at her. "I thought something awful was the matter with you," he said.

"Why didn't you go on and capture the drawbridge?" Jess demanded. "You and Ward didn't have to sneeze. I thought you'd go on, of course."

"Well, we didn't like to go without you," said Fred lamely, though, as a matter of fact, he had been alarmed by Jess's behavior and Ward had followed Fred without reasoning.

Jess felt better after her sneeze, and she decided that if any capturing was to be done that afternoon, she would have to take an active part in the proceedings.

"Come on!" she encouraged the boys. "Let's rush 'em!"

And, throwing caution aside, they ran for the ladder.

This was a wise move on Jess's part and would

have resulted in a sure and speedy victory if Ward had not been the victim of a mishap. The knight and the fair ladies were taken by surprise, but they rushed to the defense, Margy, only, failing at the critical moment.

"My foot!" she shrieked, as she tried to stand up. "Ow! It's asleep."

And she began to stamp about the hayloft, trying to get the "pins and needles" out of her foot instead of thinking about the drawbridge or ladder.

"Rush 'em, men!" shouted Jess, forgetting that not she, but Fred, was in command of the expedition.

Up the ladder went Fred, and Ward followed him. Alas and alack, what do you suppose happened to Ward? He was so excited that he pitched through one of the spaces between two rungs and there he stuck! He couldn't get back, and Jess couldn't get over him.

Polly saw what had happened first, and she began to laugh. Fred, at the top of the ladder, was scolding because no one came to help him take the castle folk prisoners, and Jess was trying frantically to pull Ward back where he belonged.

"Somebody help her!" cried Polly. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! Do look at Margy stamping around on



one foot and poor Ward stuck between the rungs! I never saw such funny people, never!"

Then Fred and Artie began to laugh, and Margy, too, as soon as she saw Ward, and Jess joined in. But Jess didn't stop trying to pull her brother out from between the rungs.

"It's lucky this is the small ladder," panted Fred, coming down to help her. "Falling all the way through a ladder is no fun, I can tell you. I did it once and nearly broke my nose."

When Ward, red-faced and sputtering, was finally freed, he declared he didn't see anything to laugh at.

"I guess you wouldn't think it was funny to be nearly cut in two," he told them.

## CHAPTER IX

### KING COLE'S HOUSE

YOU would have thought that this experience would have made Ward more careful, but it was only a few afternoons later that the fat boy found himself in trouble again.

The weather was, as Polly told her mother, "getting nicer every day" and the boys thought it was altogether too pleasant to go to school.

"Why, Fred!" Mr. Williamson exclaimed, when he heard his son make such a remark at the breakfast table one morning, "I do wish you'd tell me what kind of weather you think is good school weather. In the winter you're afraid to go to school on a snowy day, lest the snow melt before you can get out to play in it; and now when it is warm and sunshiny, you say it is too nice to go to school."

Margy laughed.

"Fred likes the day before Christmas, because we have a Christmas tree in school," she said mischievously. "That's the only day he likes to go, Daddy."

Mr. Williamson smiled and said he thought Fred liked school better than he knew.

"It's almost the end of the term and that always makes the days seem longer," he said. "I remember how I used to think vacation would never come. Perhaps if we went out to the Davis farm this afternoon, to-day's session might go more quickly."

"Oh, yes!" Fred bounced about in delight. "Are you going, Daddy? Will you come and get us?"

"I'll take all those I find at the corner of Vine and Orchard Streets at half past three this afternoon," answered Mr. Williamson smilingly. "Any one who is kept in for whispering or tardiness, will just have to be counted out. I can't promise to wait."

Margy and Fred fairly raced to school. No danger of a tardy mark for them. They could hardly wait to see Polly and Artie Marley and Jess and Ward Larue, for they knew their father had the other members of the Riddle Club in mind when he said he would take those he found ready at half past three.

"Be sure you ask this noon if you can go," said Margy earnestly, and the other children promised.

They came back to the afternoon session with

the report that both mothers had said "yes." School was over at a quarter past three, and the six hurried away to the corner of Vine and Orchard Streets, which they reached just as Mr. Williamson drove up in his comfortable, roomy car.

"Pile in," he invited them, and in they piled.

There was a strange man in the seat beside Mr. Williamson, and Margy whispered that she thought it was the "basket man."

"He's going out to the Davis farm to get Mr. Davis' order for baskets and crates," she said, and Polly nodded to show she understood.

Mr. Williamson owned the Davis farm, several miles from River Bend, and Mr. Davis farmed it for him on shares. The vegetables and fruit he raised were shipped on the steamboats and brought to the wharf by truck. Every year a man came to see whether Mr. Davis would need new crates and baskets in which to send the stuff he raised to market. Margy and Fred knew all this and had of course told it to the other members of the Riddle Club.

The children were always eager to go to the Davis farm, not alone for the drive, which was very pleasant, but because they were allowed to roam the farm at will, once they reached there. Mr. Davis had no boys and girls of his own, and

he was fond of youthful guests. He always gave them something good to eat to bring home with them.

A drive of five or six miles brought them to the farm and Mrs. Davis came to the door of the house as soon as the car stopped. She had seen them drive down the lane.

"John's in the barn," she said to Mr. Williamson. "He'll be glad to see you. And I have some fresh butter for Mrs. Williamson, if you can take it when you go."

Mr. Williamson said he would drive down to the barn, and then Mrs. Davis asked the children if they did not want a drink of ice-cold milk.

They were thirsty, and gladly followed her into the stone dairy, where pans of milk and cream sat on the shelves, waiting for churning day. Mrs. Davis ladled the milk for them to drink from a large can set in a trough where running water kept it cool.

"We're having a drain pipe laid through the orchard," she told Fred, as she handed him his glass. "And King Cole has a new house built since you were here, early in the spring."

King Cole was the farm dog. Mrs. Davis knew that Fred was interested in the farm and she liked to tell him the bits of news. He always



"BOW WOW!" HE SAID "GR-R-R! I WANT A BONE!"  
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declared that some day he meant to be a farmer, while Margy was determined to grow up and be the captain of one of the river boats.

"I'd like to see the dog-house," said Fred thoughtfully. "Some day I'm going to have a dog of my own and I'd like to build its house myself. I have a tool-chest. Daddy gave it to me for my birthday."

"King Cole's house is out near the chicken-yard," answered Mrs. Davis. "We keep him out there nights to frighten away any one who might take a fancy to the chickens. King has gone to town to-day with one of the men—he'll be sorry to miss you."

They thanked Mrs. Davis for the milk and raced away to look at the dog-house. They all knew the way to the chicken-yard, and they found King Cole's new home under a crooked apple tree.

"Well, I call that a good-looking house," said Fred critically. "I wonder if I could make one as good."

"There isn't much to it," observed Jess, a little disappointed. "I thought dog-houses were different."

"Huh!" returned Ward. "I s'pose you thought it would have windows and lace curtains, like a doll-house!"

Jess had had some such idea, but not for worlds would she have admitted it.

"Well, I don't think it is very wonderful, either," said Margy, turning up her small nose in disdain. "Why didn't they make it larger?"

"It's large enough for a dog," asserted Artie.

"You don't make a dog-house any larger than you can help," Fred instructed her, "because it has to be carried from place to place. 'Tisn't like a chicken-house that always stays in the chicken-yard."

"Oh!" said Margy, looking at the neatly painted little wooden affair with more respect.

Polly had been examining the chain screwed into the wood and now asked if King Cole were chained to his house, how could he be expected to chase a chicken thief?

"They let him lose at night," replied Fred. "Or else, perhaps, Mr. Davis thinks his barking will keep people away."

"Want to see how King looks when he is in his house?" asked Ward. "I'll show you."

He lay down on the ground and began to wriggle backward, toward the opening in the dog-house.

"I never saw a dog go into a house backward," objected Jess.

"I never did, either," Ward admitted. "But

you never saw a dog standing with his head inside and his tail out—they're always standing with their heads out."

"They go in and turn around," said Fred.

"There isn't room inside there for King Cole to do that," declared Ward. "Watch me, and I'll show you what he does."

They watched while Ward wriggled across the grass—with some damage to his clean blouse—and began to work himself into the little dog-house.

"There—isn't—such—a heap of room—to spare!" he grunted.

He had some trouble to wriggle through the door, but finally he was satisfied. He grinned amiably and pretended to pant.

"Bow wow!" he said. "Gr-rr! I want a bone!"

"Here, doggie, nice doggie!" called Fred.

"Here, King Cole, come on, good boy!"

Ward snickered and made believe to jump up and down and bark with delight, as he had seen King Cole do when Mr. Davis spoke to him. The dog-house bounced with him and Polly laughed.

"If King Cole comes home and finds you in his house, Ward Larue, he might not like it," she suggested.

"Well," said Ward, "he won't find me here. I'm coming out. It's hot inside."

He began to wriggle out and—he stuck!

"I knew it!" wailed Jess. "I knew it! Something always happens to you."

Poor Ward tried harder than ever to crawl through the hole. The house shook as he struggled, but he could not squeeze through.

"You ought to have known that hole was too small for you," scolded Fred.

"We saw him go through," Polly reminded them gently. "I never thought he wouldn't be able to get out."

Artie had been staring at Ward and now he put his thoughts into words.

"Perhaps he is fatter than when he went in," he said.

"I am not!" Ward protested.

Artie thought he was.

"You'll probably have to stay there for a long time," he said cheerfully. "I saw some pictures once of a pig who lived in a little house like that. It was a square house, and when he was small there was plenty of room. But the folks kept feeding him and feeding him, and the pig kept growing fatter and fatter. And by and by he couldn't get out of the house. So the folks sent

for the carpenter and he chopped the house off and that pig was just the shape of the house. He was square and had four corners."

"I don't believe it," said Margy scornfully.

Ward had been fascinated by Artie's story, but he didn't wish to believe it, either.

"I don't want to live in a dog-house," said he. "And I don't want them to chop it off me—suppose the hatchet slipped and cut me?"

"It's lucky they built the house small," declared Fred. "We can load it into the automobile and take you home. I told you dog-houses are built small so they can be moved."

"I won't go home in a dog-house!" cried Ward.

"You can't stay here all night," said Jess. "You couldn't frighten the chicken thieves. And, besides, where would King Cole sleep?"

"I wonder if he will try to squeeze in past you?" Artie speculated. "There isn't much room, but he might try. Is there room for a dog inside, Ward?"

Ward thought not. Certainly there was not an inch to spare in the round opening. The more Ward thought about the dog coming home and insisting on squeezing past him into the dog-house, the less he liked it.

"Let's pull on his arms," said Polly, who had

been trying to think of a way to rescue the fat boy. "Margy and I will pull one arm and Fred and Jess and Artie can pull on the other."

"You'll pull 'em off," objected Ward, and indeed there seemed some danger, when you knew, as Ward did, how hard five children can pull.

"Then," said Fred solemnly, "there is nothing to do but to go and get the hatchet. We'll chop you out. I don't suppose Mr. Davis will like it," he added, "but it can't be helped."

"No," agreed Polly, "it can't be helped. Bring the axe, too, Fred, and I'll help you."

## CHAPTER X

### AN EASY RESCUE

WHILE Fred went to get the hatchet—and probably the axe—Polly and Artie and Margy and Jess sat down and looked at Ward.

“How do you feel?” asked Jess.

“Hot,” responded Ward. “I wish I had a drink of water.”

“I’ll go get you one,” offered Polly.

Jess said she would go with her. They knew where there was a spring—at the foot of the orchard—and there would be a gourd dipper there.

“Margy,” said Artie, when Jess and Polly had gone after the water, “let’s go get something to fan him with.”

“What?” asked Margy, unwilling to walk far until she knew what she was going after.

“Oh, one of the bags we saw in the dairy barn last time we were out here,” said Artie. “We can wave that and it will make a breeze.”

They departed for the barn to get the bag, and



poor Ward, left alone, tried once more to wriggle out of the dog-house. He couldn't do it. Indeed, he seemed to be more tightly wedged in than ever.

"I wonder if I'm growing fatter?" he thought in despair.

Clear and sweet and shrill, a whistle sounded somewhere. Ward could not see the whistler, but he heard him.

"Hey!" he called. "Hey—please!"

Footsteps came nearer and some one walked around the dog-house and, stooping down, peered in. It was a merry-faced boy about sixteen years old. He had done the gay whistling.

"And would you mind telling me what you are doing in King Cole's house?" he asked, when he saw Ward. "Has he sub-let it to you and moved out?"

"What is sub-let?" demanded Ward, forgetting for the moment that he was uncomfortable.

"It's when some one rents a house and in turn rents it to some one else," explained the boy carelessly. "Are you thinking of spending the summer, could I ask?"

"I can't get out," said Ward sadly. "I crawled in, all right; but I can't squeeze out again. Fred has gone to get the hatchet."

"That's kind of Fred, but why does he want the

hatchet?" asked the boy, still staring at Ward.

"He's going to chop me out before King Cole comes back and wants to get in here," said Ward.

"Oh!" said the boy, puckering up his lips to whistle again.

He whistled the first verse of "Annie Laurie" and then he spoke.

"Would you like to come out?" he said.

"Of course I would," declared Ward, a little indignantly.

"Then there's nothing to prevent you," the boy assured him, and he fumbled at the roof of the dog-house.

To Ward's astonishment, the roof folded back—like a door—and all he had to do was to stand up and step over the side.

"What did you do?" he asked eagerly. "How did you get it open?"

The boy showed him a little catch which fastened the roof down and two hinges which allowed it to be folded back.

"Mr. Davis had the house made that way so it can be easily sunned and aired," he explained. "Hello, where did this parade come from?"

Ward looked. In one direction he saw Jess and Polly, carrying two gourds filled and brimming over with water. From another direction came Margy and Artie, dragging an old grain bag.

From a third a procession led by Mr. Williamson and Mr. Davis, one armed with a hatchet, the other carrying an axe. Following the two leaders were Fred and Mrs. Davis. The latter had her sewing basket with her.

The boy who had freed Ward sat down on the grass and began to laugh. He laughed so hard he rolled over and over, and by the time the others reached them, only Ward could tell what had happened. The boy could listen, but if he tried to say a word he began to laugh again.

"I declare, I forgot all about that catch," said Mr. Davis, when Ward had told him how he got out. "Fred had me so excited, I don't know what I did think. And Mother, here, figured out that after we had you chopped out or pulled out, as the case might be, your clothes would need mending, so she brought her basket along."

Mr. Williamson laughed, too, when he found that Ward was all right, and before they started back to the house and barn, King Cole came bouncing out to them, delighted to find his friends and insisting on licking their hands and faces. He never knew how near he came to finding his house occupied by a fat little boy. Not that he would have minded. Mr. Davis declared that King was such a perfect gentleman, he would have been glad to turn his house over to Ward.

The boy who had helped Ward out of his tight fit, lived on the next farm—he was working there for a year, Mr. Davis said—and he had been coming “across lots” to look for some missing turkeys. His name, he told the children, was Ben Yorke, and he went back to work before they left the farm, still whistling.

By the time Mrs. Davis had wrapped up the butter she wanted to send Mrs. Williamson, it was five o'clock and Mr. Williamson said they must be starting home. The children teased Ward a good deal, but he took it good-naturedly.

“You’ll be sorry when I win the riddle prize,” he told them, as they tumbled out of the car before the Williamson house. “I won’t buy you even one ice-cream cone with my dollar.”

He said this again the next day at recess, when Artie and Fred took him down to the cellar to show him a mouse hole and ask him if he thought he could crawl through that. Carrie Pepper overheard him. It really was remarkable, even sweet-tempered Polly admitted, how much Carrie managed to overhear.

“Have you a dollar, Ward?” she asked coaxingly.

“Not yet,” said Ward cautiously. “But I may have.”

“Are you going to earn it?” asked Carrie.

"Win it," said Ward briefly. "My father offered a dollar to any one who can solve his riddle, and maybe I'll get it."

"I'm good at riddles," suggested Carrie. "What is it? I'll win the prize, maybe."

"You can't," Ward informed her. "You're not a member of our Riddle Club."

"Is it only for members?" asked Carrie, much disappointed. "You said 'any one,' Ward Larrue."

Ward felt uncomfortable.

"I know I did; but I meant any one in the club," he said uneasily.

"Well, of course you'll win the dollar—you or Jess. But I don't think it is very fair to the rest," declared Carrie, tossing her long dark braids.

"What isn't fair?" asked Ward.

"Why, you know the answer to your own father's riddle—every one must know that!" declared Carrie disagreeably. "So it's really no work at all for you to win the prize."

Ward stared at her. To his disappointment, when he opened his mouth he only sputtered. So he did what was truly the wisest thing he could have done—turned away and left her.

"Now you see," said Polly, when he told the others what Carrie had said, "that is one reason

we don't want Carrie Pepper in our Riddle Club. She would spoil everything."

Margy was just behind Polly—the six chums were walking home to lunch—and she called out to know if Carrie had asked to join the club.

"She hasn't asked, but she's hinted," said Polly. "I know she will ask right out some day, but I, for one, am not going to say a word till she does."

The next Saturday was such a perfect day—floods of warm sunshine, mixed with little gusty breezes that seemed to come down from the fleecy clouds—that Polly knew what she wanted to do as soon as she woke up.

"Mother," she said to Mrs. Marley, when she went downstairs, "couldn't we have a picnic? We haven't had one since last summer."

"Winter isn't the picnic season," returned Mrs. Marley, with a smile. "What kind of picnic have you in mind, Daughter?"

Polly kept a small list in her mind of the different kinds of picnics. She was not one of those girls who thinks a picnic is a picnic and nothing more. No, Polly knew each was different. There was the Family Picnic, when the Marley family only went—usually some distance away, sometimes as far as Lake Bassing. There was the Big Picnic when the Marleys and the Larues

and the Williamsons all spent the day, going in Mr. Larue's and Mr. Williamson's cars and taking supper as well as lunch with them. And there was the Little Picnic—that meant that Polly and Artie and Margy and Fred and Jess and Ward went off to the Grove and played games and ate their lunch together.

"I think it would be a nice day for a Little Picnic, Mother," said Polly.

Mrs. Marley said she thought so, too, and she promised to make sandwiches and look in the cake box for drop cakes. Polly flew out to the fence to tell Margy and ask her to go across the street and tell Jess.

The Grove was at one end of River Bend, the end furthest from the river. For this reason the mothers liked their boys and girls to go there to play. The river was very beautiful and very fascinating and perfectly safe as long as you stayed on the banks. Of course now and then a child did forget, and then he rolled down the bank and some one had to fish him out, very wet and very cold. But the Grove was as beautiful as the river and quite safe and dry and so green and cool and shady. There was a wide, deep meadow between the last house in River Bend and the Grove, and it was easy to play that you were in the jungle, though really you were never out of sight of peo-



ple and houses. The members of the Riddle Club often went there to play.

This morning they started off soon after breakfast, the three girls carrying the lunch and the boys a box or two and some old newspapers, for they had promised the three mothers to bring them back early ferns for the gardens.

"That riddle your father gave us certainly is a hard one," said Fred to Jess. "I think about it every night till I go to sleep and I don't know that I'll ever solve it."

"The meeting is next week," Jess reminded him.

"I thought of something that will make the meetings lots more fun," announced Polly, climbing under the fence that marked off the meadow.

"Oh, what?" asked Margy, pushing her lunch box through and climbing after it.

"Forfeits!" said Polly. "If you can't guess a riddle, you have to pay a forfeit."

The boys stared at her in admiration.

"Gee, that will be fun," Fred approved. "I like to see people pay forfeits."

His sister looked over her shoulder and grinned.

"You don't like to pay them yourself," she said. "But then," she hurried to assure him, "you are pretty good at guessing riddles, Fred."

Artie and Fred and Ward reached the Grove

first. Usually they raced to see who should touch the first tree, but this morning the boxes hindered them. The girls were about in the center of the meadow when the three boys came to the row of tall pine trees that marked the beginning of the Grove.

"There's an automobile!" said Artie, pointing.

Sure enough, a small car was drawn up inside the circle of shade cast by the outside trees. It was a fairly new-looking car, painted red.

"Do you suppose the folks who own it are having a picnic in the Grove?" asked Artie.

"Perhaps. But I don't see anybody," returned Fred.

"Neither do I. It's queer, isn't it?" came from Ward.

The boys looked around, but not a soul was in sight. They walked around the abandoned car and inspected it.

"Funny," declared Ward. "How would a car come in this out-of-the-way place?"

## CHAPTER XI

### IN THE GROVE

BEFORE Fred or Artie could say what they thought, the three girls caught up with them.

"Whose car is that?" asked Margy curiously.

"Maybe it doesn't belong to any one," returned Fred. "Perhaps the folks who used to use it have moved away and left it—the way the people on the farm next to Mr. Davis left a plow and a hay rake out in the fields when they moved."

"People don't leave automobiles," Polly declared. "Not unless they are broken down. This one looks all right."

"Let's get in and see if we can make it go," suggested Fred, and Ward and Artie echoed him.

"Fred Williamson, don't you dare!" scolded Margy. "Daddy won't let you fool with our car, and this doesn't even belong to us."

"I wouldn't touch it," advised Polly soberly. "Some one might come along, and you wouldn't want to be found in a car that didn't belong to you."

Fred hastened to assure her that he was only "fooling."

"Let's play first," said Polly, wisely thinking it best to distract their thoughts from the abandoned car. "Then we'll have lunch. We'll dig the ferns last; the longer we let them stay where they are growing, the better."

"Then," said Artie eagerly, "let's play 'Early Settlers.'"

Ward groaned. He knew all about playing "Early Settlers." It was one of Artie's pet games and an invention of his.

"You needn't be an Indian and lurk behind a tree, Ward," Artie told the fat boy kindly. "You can be a settler and stay in the cabin."

Ward was good-natured and seldom argued.

"All right," he agreed. "I don't mind."

This game of Artie's really needed more players than six, but the children were so used to playing by themselves that they never felt the lack of other companions. When they played "Early Settlers" three of them had to be Indians and three of them Puritans and they liked the Grove to play in, for then they had trees to hide behind.

"Who wants to be an Indian?" asked Artie. "Besides Fred," he added.

For Fred always wanted to be an Indian. In-

deed, his mother said sometimes she thought he *was* an Indian, he made so much noise around the house.

"I'll be a settler," decided Margy.

Polly would have preferred to be a settler, too, but she knew Artie wanted to be one, and if she wasn't an Indian he would have to be. So she said she would be an Indian, and Jess, who liked to do as Polly did, said she would be an Indian also. That left Ward and Margy and Artie for settlers.

"Now you must start out for church with your guns on your shoulders," said Fred, who knew the game as well as Artie did. "And we attack you in the woods."

"Don't look till we've hidden," urged Polly.

"You said I could stay in the cabin," protested Ward.

"Well maybe you can, if you don't get scalped on the way to church," said Fred cheerfully. "You can sit in your cabin after you get back."

"Oh, all right," agreed Ward, who hated to be chased.

The three settlers covered their eyes and tried to close their ears, while the three Indians tiptoed off to hide behind trees. The idea was for them to stay in hiding and pounce out on the settlers before they were discovered. If they could touch

a settler first, he was their prisoner; but if a settler touched an Indian, or ran away safe "home" from him, he was supposed to have escaped with his scalp.

"Do you remember," giggled Jess, as they hunted for comfortable trees, "the last time we played and Ward was an Indian? He hid behind a little second-growth maple and every one could see him ten feet away!"

When the Indians thought themselves securely hidden, Fred whistled and the settlers started out to go to church. They carried sticks over their shoulders, to serve as guns, and they walked very cautiously.

"Ah-ha, I've got you!" cried Artie, rushing furiously at a bush and whacking the leaves as though he hoped to shake the Indian out of it. "Come on out, Red Man!"

"There isn't any one there," snickered Margie.

There wasn't. A passing breeze had stirred the leaves and Artie had thought he saw some one hiding there.

"Ow! Ow!" shrieked Margy, as Fred leaped out from behind a tree just back of her. "Ow! Ow! Here's one now!"

Margy never could help shrieking when she was excited, and the game of "Early Settlers" had been banned at home for just this reason. To hear

Margy, when an Indian was after her, was to believe that nothing short of a freshet was roaring along a narrow valley or a terrible fire had happened somewhere and that she was spreading the news.

She tore off through the Grove now, Fred sprinting after her. Around and around the trunks of trees they dashed, dodging, slipping and jumping over stumps and rocks. Margy could run well, and there was a fair chance that she would reach "home" before Fred caught her.

"Well, come on," said Artie. "We can't stand here all day; we're on our way to church."

"Let's sit down and rest a minute," begged Ward. "It's so hot."

"And have the Indians come right up and capture us, I suppose?" replied Artie scornfully.

Ward groaned and walked on.

"When we get to church may I sit down?" he asked.

"The early settlers had some one stand on guard, but I suppose I can do that and let you rest," replied Artie kindly.

They walked on a few steps and then Ward made a silent signal. He pointed to two trees, one on either side of the narrow path they were treading and just ahead.

From behind one tree a bit of something bright



pink showed and something blue and white extended from the other. Polly had worn a pink dress and Jess a blue and white gingham.

The boys dropped to their hands and knees and crawled the short distance to the trees.

"Just as easy," said Ward, grasping the bit of pink.

"'Tis Pocahontas," declared Artie, taking a good grasp on the piece of blue and white gingham, which proved to be the deep pocket on Jess's dress.

Jess laughed. She didn't mind being taken prisoner, it seemed.

"Of course we would have seen you coming and captured you," she explained; "but we were watching something."

"Yes," said Polly. "You know that car we saw when we came? Two men are trying to drive it, and they can't get it started."

The flash of sunlight on something bright made Artie wink his eyes. He looked where Polly pointed and down through an avenue of trees and the openings in the underbrush, he could see the bright red car with two men sitting in the front seat. The sun reflected from the windshield had caused the sudden flash.

A commotion back of them made them turn and look in the opposite direction. Flushed and

laughing, Fred and Margy were coming, Fred leading Margy by the long string of her gingham sash belt. He had evidently caught her and made her his prisoner.

"Did the Indians get you?" he called to Artie and Ward.

"No, we took them," shouted Artie. "Early Settlers can always beat the Indians," he boasted, forgetting his history lessons with ease.

Fred and his captive came up to the group and then Fred caught sight of the car.

"What are they doing?" he asked. "Does it belong to them?"

"They can't start the engine," said Ward. "Come on, I'm going back and watch."

It was not far to walk back to the place where they had entered the Grove, and when they reached the open space they found a mechanic from the River Bend garage bending over the hood of the car. The two men sat with their backs to the members of the Riddle Club, apparently waiting for the motor to start.

"We might as well sit down," suggested Ward, who never by any chance stood up unless he had to.

Down sat the six in a quiet circle, to watch. There is always something fascinating about watching another person work over machinery,

and the boys would have liked to have gone closer. But they recognized Jim Fenner, the mechanic, as the garage man who couldn't "abide young ones hanging over his shoulder" when he worked. Ed Talbot, the other mechanic at the garage, never minded how many boys perched on the running board to ask him questions when he "took down" an engine. He was always ready to give away broken wheels and nails and old inner tubes and he had probably furnished the foundations for more express wagons than any other man in River Bend. But Mr. Fenner was not Ed Talbot, and Fred and Ward and Artie knew they must keep at a respectful distance.

"You'll have to get up," said Jim Fenner presently, wiping his greasy hands on his overalls and speaking to the two men in the car.

They rose and stepped down, strolling over to the fence. They leaned against it, facing the children at whom they glanced quickly and away again.

Artie gasped. He stole a look at Fred, who did not see, for he was staring at the men. Ward's face crimsoned as it always did when he was excited.

One of the strangers took off his hat and mopped his face with his handkerchief. He had stiff wiry hair that stuck up stubbornly. He was

smoking a fat, black cigar, and his clothes, while not especially neat, were striking indeed. They were gray and white checked and he wore a bright yellow necktie.

"Why don't you smoke?" he asked his companion.

The other man took off his hat—it was a hard, round black derby—and Ward almost gasped. His hair was oily and plastered down so close to his head that it almost hid his eyes. From his hat he took a fat black cigar and lighted it, tossing the match over the fence.

"You go get that match and make sure it's out," said Jim Fenner sternly. "We've got enough troubles around here without starting a forest fire."

"The match is out," said the man impatiently. "It was out before it touched the ground."

"They all say that," returned the mechanic. "You go get that match and show me it's out."

Margy moved a little closer to Polly. Jim Fenner sounded as though he might be quarreling.

"What right have you to give me orders?" said the man crossly. "I'm paying you to repair that engine."

The mechanic straightened up. He wiped his hands again on his overalls and began to gather up his tools.

"Here, what are you doing?" asked the man in alarm. "Where 're you going? You're not through."

He knew that there was only one garage in River Bend and that any other town in any direction was several miles away. If his car was not repaired that morning it might be a day or two before he could get it fixed.

"I'm through unless you climb that fence and pick up that match and bring it here so I can see it is out," announced Jim Fenner, still collecting his tools.

Grumbling, the man who had tossed away the lighted match climbed over the fence and got down on his hands and knees to search for it. While he was hunting for it, Fred scrambled up on his feet.

"Come on," he said briefly.

## CHAPTER XII

### RIDDLES TO TELL

THE other children followed Fred obediently back to the point where they had left the boxes and the lunch parcels.

"Do you suppose he will find the match?" asked Margy, whispering as though she thought the men could overhear.

"Of course," said Artie. "He didn't throw it so far away."

"And I don't believe it was lighted," declared Polly. "I think I saw it go out before it touched the ground."

"You can't think about a lighted match," said Fred seriously. "You have to be sure. It's men like those tramps who set the woods afire."

"Tramps!" echoed Jess. "What are you talking about? They were not tramps. They had a car and they weren't dirty and messy-looking the way tramps are."

"No," Polly agreed with her. "Their clothes were a little funny, but they weren't tramp clothes."

Fred had not meant to say "tramps," but he meant to stick by what he had said.

"They're tramps, all right," he insisted. "I guess tramps can drive an automobile, if they want to. Can't they, Artie?"

Artie nodded and Ward thought he would set things right.

"They may not be tramps now," he admitted cautiously; "but they were when we saw them."

"When you saw them?" cried Jess. "Why, you never saw those men before in your life! I don't believe they were ever in River Bend until to-day."


"Now you've done it!" exclaimed Fred. "You know how girls are!"

And as girls have a way with them, it was not long before Polly and Jess and Margy had heard all about the two tramps who had gone to sleep in the Larue barn.

"I think you were ever so brave to talk to them," said Polly, when she had listened to the story. "I'd run the other way, if I saw them sleeping in the barn."

"They can't get in again," Ward hastened to assure her. "Daddy had two locks put on the doors."

"What do you suppose they are doing with that car?" said Artie. "And they were dressed





up. Perhaps they are not tramps any more."

"Oh, perhaps they have been working and earned some money since we saw them," replied Fred carelessly. "I'd know them anywhere by their hair, wouldn't you, Ward?"

Ward said yes, and then he asked if it wasn't most time to eat.

"Of course," said Polly. "You must be starved. If you'll go get the water, we'll spread out the sandwiches."

There was a spring in the center of the field bordering the Grove, and the three boys went after the water, taking three small cans with them. They would fill these cans with little sword ferns after lunch, and meanwhile they made very handy drinking cups.

When they came back to find the sandwiches and cake neatly arranged on a tablecloth made of a white napkin, they reported that the automobile had gone on and that there was no sign of the two men.

"And the woods haven't burned, so the match was out," said Polly.

"The car would still be there if the match wasn't out," chuckled Fred. "When Jim Fenner says a thing, it goes."

For some mysterious reason the morning is the best part of a picnic. After lunch one begins to

think about going home. The children ate their good things and then set to work to dig the ferns, and as soon as the boxes and the three cans were filled with roots and dirt and the beautiful, slender green fronds of the new spring ferns, they decided that it must be nearly supper time.

"I'm going to take home some maiden-hair fern," said Polly. "I'll wrap it in a newspaper and perhaps Mother can make it grow."

"Let's each take one," said Jess. "My aunt can make it grow, but Mother says it is so delicate she never has any luck."

Maiden-hair ferns must be handled carefully, and the girls were so afraid of injuring the roots that they took "half the Grove" up with them, so Artie said. But Artie was anxious to go home and he was not as patient as he might have been.

"I want to study my riddles," he explained, when they were on the homeward way at last.

Polly laughed, her dark eyes dancing.

"Artie sits down and studies riddles the same way he studies his spelling," she said. "He gets in a corner and won't let any one speak to him."

"Have you got the answer to the prize riddle yet, Artie?" asked Fred.

"No," answered Artie, shaking his yellow head. "No, I haven't. It's a lot of work to learn new riddles and an answer, too."

"I almost have the answer," said Fred. "But I don't think I have it just right yet. Gee, wouldn't I like to win!"

"What would you do with the dollar if you got it?" asked his sister.

"I'd buy the knife I saw in Mr. Marley's window," replied Fred quickly. "It costs a dollar and it has four blades and a ring to hang it on a chain with."

"I'd buy a chain of beads," announced Margy, the word "chain" evidently giving her a thought.

"I'd get water color paints and a paint book," declared Jess, who dearly loved to use bright colors.

Ward beamed, his round face shining.

"I'd buy candy and popcorn and mixed nuts," he said happily. "I wouldn't mind winning that dollar."

"Artie, what would you do with a dollar?" asked Polly, smiling at her little brother.

"Oh, I'd get lead soldiers, I guess," said Artie dreamily. "Or a picture puzzle. Or maybe a book with knights and castles in it."

"I know exactly what I'd buy," declared Polly quickly. "Six ice-cream sodas with whipped cream on the top!"

"Um-m," murmured Ward, on hearing this.

"Well," drawled Margy, as they turned into

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Elm Road, "we have to win the prize before we can spend it."

"And perhaps no one will guess the riddle," said Jess gloomily.

She was not the only member of the Riddle Club who said that before the second meeting of the club the next week. When the club day came round and the six hurried home from school and up the ladder to the room in the hayloft, the prize riddle was first in their minds.

The room was in perfect order, for Polly and Jess and Margy had carefully dusted it and Ward had propped up the window before he left for school that morning, so it was not too warm, but most comfortable.

"I know you are thinking of the prize riddle," said President Polly, when she had rapped on the table and announced that the club was in session. "Jess will collect the answers and put them in this box on the table; but we are not going to open them till the very last thing."

Jess went about soberly collecting the slips of paper from each and placed them in the small pasteboard box that Polly, with her usual thoughtfulness, had in readiness.

"Is there any business to be discussed before we ask the riddles?" Polly inquired, in her most businesslike manner, after the papers were

weighted down with the gavel lest a stray breeze disturb them.

Fred was on his feet at once.

"I have to collect the dues," he said firmly.

"Have we any expenses?" asked Artie hopefully.

"Not yet," Fred replied. "But you never can tell."

"How much will we have when you collect this time?" Margy wanted to know, holding her dime carefully as though she did not intend to let it go unless she approved of the treasurer's report.

Fred added up some figures on a piece of paper he hastily tore from a little book he carried in his pocket.

"We'll have one dollar and twenty cents," he announced.

The amount either pleased or startled Margy, for she let her money drop into the bank without a word of protest. Five other ten-cent pieces tinkled after, and Fred subsided, his duty done.

"If there is no more business before the club," said Polly, trying to speak slowly and not succeeding very well, "we'll ask the riddles. Start with Jess and go around."

"You said we were going to pay forfeits," Jess reminded her. "So you ought to ask the riddles, Polly."

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"No, it will be more fun if we take turns," said Polly. "Each ask the one who sits next. Hurry up, Jess."

"All right," agreed Jess amiably. "Margy," here's one: When is a wall like a fish?"

"When it is red," said Margy confidently.

"A fish isn't red," argued Jess.

"Haven't you ever seen salmon?" asked Margy scornfully. "Salmon is red and so is lobster—after it's boiled."

"Lobster isn't fish," declared Ward.

"Why, it is, too," said Margy impatiently. "Mr. Gray, the fish man, always sells lobsters, and his sign says 'Nothing but the best fish'—so there!"

"All walls aren't red," said Artie, who had been thinking this matter over.

"Red brick ones are," Margy informed him quickly.

"Well, is that the right answer?" Polly asked, looking at Jess.

"Of course it isn't," replied Jess. "The answer is, a wall is like a fish when it is scaled."

"My mother has Mr. Gray take the scales off the fish before he brings them," said Margy, as though that had something to do with the answer—made it incorrect in some way.

"Walls haven't scales," criticized Ward.

"If you scale a wall, that means you climb over it," said Artie. "I read about it—firemen always scale walls."

"Well, I think it is silly not to say 'climb over,'" pronounced Margy.

"You have to pay a forfeit, because you didn't guess it," said Jess very firmly.

"Here's my handkerchief—it's spandy clean," Margy offered. "Will that do?"

Jess thought it would, and Margy put it on the desk, as she called the table behind which Polly sat.

"Your turn, Margy," said Polly. "Ask Ward."

"Ward," began Margy, "Why is a steel trap like the measles?"

"Because it is catching," answered Ward, without a moment's hesitation.

"Why—why—you guessed it!" sputtered Margy. "I don't see how you knew it so—so fast! You guessed it the very first time."

"Where did you get the answer, Ward?" asked his sister, gazing at the roly-poly lad with respectful awe.

"Oh, I'm pretty good at guessing riddles," replied Ward, his eyes twinkling.



"You may be good, but you're not usually so quick as that," declared Fred shrewdly. "You had the answer down pat."

"Go on, Ward; tell us how you happened to know it," coaxed Artie, thinking if there was a secret he might learn it, too, and always know the answer to whatever riddle was asked.

"I suppose if I don't tell you, you'll keep pestering me," sighed Ward. "It's a secret, but I won't be mean about it."

## CHAPTER XIII

### FORFEITS TO PAY

ARTIE leaned forward, so as not to miss a word, and the others held their breaths. Jess had always wanted to hear a pin drop, and this, something told her, was an excellent moment to test the saying. If she could only get hold of a pin and drop it, she would know whether or not there was any truth in the old adage. But she had no pin, so she listened with the rest.

"The reason I knew the answer to Margy's riddle," announced Ward coolly, "is because I learned it."

"Learned it?" echoed Margy.

"Sure! Learned it," Ward insisted. "It was one of the riddles I meant to ask."

"Oh!" said Margy limply, and Polly laughed.

The explanation was so simple that they were all surprised and Artie was disappointed. He had hoped to discover the whole art of answering riddles, though nothing is ever as easy as that.

"Well, you don't have to pay a forfeit," said Jess. "And it's your turn to ask."

"All right," said Ward quickly. "What has ears but cannot hear, Polly?"

"Fish?" inquired Polly hopefully.

"Fish haven't any ears," Ward assured her. "You may have three guesses," he added generously.

"Of course fish have ears," argued Margy. "Who said they haven't?"

"Well, perhaps they have ears, but they can't hear with them," declared Fred, forgetting the riddles for a moment in his interest in fish.

But Jess thought that fish not only had ears, but that they were ears with which to hear.

"When people go fishing, don't they have to keep still?" she demanded triumphantly. "If fish can't hear a noise, why does talking frighten them away?"

Ward admitted that she might be right.

"But even if fish have ears, that isn't the answer to my riddle," he said stoutly, thus reminding the others that this was a meeting of the Riddle Club and that the business on hand was to ask and answer riddles.

"Well, then, let me think again," murmured Polly. "What has ears, but cannot hear? I know—your arithmetic book, Ward!"

It was Ward's turn to look astonished. He stared at Polly, who smiled back at him sweetly.

"My arithmetic book hasn't any ears," declared Ward.

"How funny!" giggled Jess. "What made you say that, Polly?"

Polly laughed merrily and the others laughed with her, though they didn't know what the joke could be.

"I didn't really think that was the answer," Polly confessed, "but I happened to remember what Miss Havens told you last year; she said your arithmetic book was disgracefully shabby and dog-eared."

"Is that the answer to the riddle?" questioned Jess.

"No, it isn't," replied Ward, and Polly declared that she would have to give up.

"Can't you guess?" asked Ward. "It's awfully easy, when you know it. The answer is corn."

"What a dub I am!" cried Polly. "Of course it's corn. I don't see why I never think of anything until it is too late," she mourned. "What shall I pay as a forfeit?"

"Your club badge," suggested Margy, and that was placed beside the handkerchief on the table.

"You ask one, Polly," said Artie. "It's my turn to guess."

"All right, Artie, tell me this: "What is the color of the wind?"

Artie thought solemnly for a moment, his blue eyes staring out of the window.

"Gray," he guessed finally. "I've often seen it, blowing down the road. The wind is gray."

"That was the dust you saw," Polly told him kindly. "Dust is gray. Besides, Artie, you know a riddle is tricky; you mustn't try to get an exact answer, but a funny one."

"That's why I hardly ever get a riddle right," complained Artie. "I get the right answer and it isn't the right answer, but a wrong one is the right one, lots of times."

"Of course. And that is why riddles are fun," cried Jess. "Hurry up, Artie, and guess what color the wind is."

"I don't believe it is any color," said Artie suspiciously.

"Yes, it is," declared Polly. "Think real hard, Artie."

Artie proceeded to think. He put his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands and he was so quiet—and the room with him—that Jess might have heard two pins drop. But she was not thinking about pins at that moment. She was wondering what color the wind was.

"I think——" said Artie at last, when Polly had begun to fear he had quite gone to sleep, "I think the wind is purple."

"Oh, you almost guessed it!" cried Polly. "It isn't purple, Artie!"

"Sometimes it is," said Artie. "Hills are purple and the wind blows over them. Haven't you seen purple hills 'way off, Polly?"

"Yes. But I *told* you riddles are funny," cried Polly desperately. "Don't try to get a sensible answer, Artie. Now you have one more guess—do use some sense."

Jess snickered at this.

"How," she asked, "can Artie use some sense when he isn't supposed to think of a sensible answer?"

"Don't be silly," Polly told her. "You know what I mean."

"Sh!" Ward cautioned them. "Artie's thinking."

Whatever might be said of Artie, no one could ever truthfully declare that he spoke before he made up his mind. His search for an answer that was not sensible took just as much time as his effort to produce a serious reply had required.

"The color of wind is green," he announced solemnly, after a long, long silence.

"I never!" cried the bewildered Polly. "I don't believe you think at all, Artie. Whoever saw a green wind?"

"I don't know," admitted Artie pleasantly. "I never did. But that's a good silly answer."

Polly had to agree that it was, and she demanded a forfeit at once.

"You can take my knife," said Artie, handing over that treasure, a possession valuable alone to him. The knife had no blades whatever and never had had since Artie owned it.

"Well," sighed Polly, leaning back in her chair, "that was what I call hard work."

"You didn't say what the answer was," Artie objected mildly.

"My goodness me, so I didn't!" cried Polly. "Please excuse me—but you upset me, Artie, with your queer answers. The color of the wind is blew."

"Blue?" echoed Artie helplessly. "Is it blue, Polly?"

Polly leaned forward.

"I thought I was president of the Riddle Club," she said impressively. "But now I begin to think it is a debating society. Of course the wind is blew—the color of it, I mean. 'The wind blew'—don't you see?"

"Huh," said Artie, eyeing his precious knife with regret. "I s'pose that is the right silly answer."

Polly thought it best to "take his mind off his



troubles," as her grandmother was fond of saying.

"It's your turn, Artie," she encouraged him. "Ask Jess. She had to pay a forfeit before, and perhaps she will be able to guess your riddle."

Artie turned to Jess.

"What has hands but cannot feel?" he demanded sternly.

"Oh, my, my," sighed Jess. "I wish I could have good luck. What has hands but cannot feel? Do I get three guesses?"

"Three," replied Artie. "It's easy, Jess."

"That's because you know the answer," Jess informed him.

Artie shook his head. That was not the reason, he declared.

"If the answer is hard," he explained, "I forget it myself. So I learn easy riddles."

This should have encouraged Jess, but she seemed to find the prospect far from simple.

"What has hands, what has hands?" she kept murmuring.

"I have," said Fred, who was beginning to fidget. He wanted to ask a riddle himself.

"Don't bother her," said Polly. "Go ahead and think, Jess."

Jess sat near the window, and she half turned around in her chair as she heard a door slam somewhere in the Larue house.

"There goes Mr. Pepper," she said dreamily. "Mother asked him to come up and fix the clock—the kitchen clock didn't run. He's got it under his arm, so he must be taking it to the shop."

Artie tried his best to keep still, but he gave one excited bounce that drew Jess's attention to him.

"Clock!" she shouted. "Clock, Artie! A clock has hands and can't feel!"

Artie nodded. Jess had guessed the answer.

"If Artie hadn't jumped, would you have guessed it?" asked Margy curiously.

"I don't know," the honest Jess replied.

"Of course she doesn't—no one knows what she'd do, if she did something else," said Fred decidedly. "It's my turn to spring a riddle now, and it's a beauty."

"You'll have to wait and let Jess ask you," interrupted Polly firmly. "You haven't been asked to solve a single riddle, Fred."

"All right, I'm ready," said Fred, quite sure of his ability to answer the most difficult riddle.

Jess thought quickly. She learned easily, and while she was not particularly quick to answer conundrums, she could commit to memory dozens of riddles and answers, some of them most difficult. Now she selected what she called a "hard" one for Fred.

"What is that which has a mouth but never

speaks and a bed but never sleeps in it?" asked Jess slowly and carefully.

"I know that one," cried Ward, but Jess held up her hand to warn him not to tell.

"Say it again," pleaded Fred, and Jess repeated the riddle.

"There are flower beds," said Fred slowly, "but they haven't a mouth."

Jess shook her head. That wasn't right.

"Lots of things have mouths and don't speak," went on Fred, "but animals do sleep in beds."

"'Tisn't an animal," said Jess, enjoying the spectacle of Fred hard at work.

"And a gun has a mouth," Fred said thoughtfully.

"'Tisn't a gun," announced Jess.

"Forfeit! Forfeit!" shouted the other four members of the Riddle Club. "You've had your three guesses and missed, Fred."

"I almost had it," said Fred. "But never mind. I won't pay a forfeit till I know what the answer is, though."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PRIZE RIDDLE ANSWERS

FRED was always so confident that he could do everything and anything that it was small wonder even the best of his friends liked now and then to see him make a small blunder. They liked him very much, but now and then they grew just the least bit tired of hearing him announce that he was going to do this and accomplish that.

"It would be better if you did the thing first and talked about it afterward, Fred," Mr. Williamson told his son on one occasion.

However, Fred was really quick and clever in a great many ways, and it was not often that he failed in his plans.

"What is the right answer, Jess?" he asked curiously.

"Let me think," said Jess. "Oh, I know—it's a river."

Jess had forgotten the answer for just a moment, because she had been so busy watching Fred.

"A river!" Fred looked surprised. (Somehow

the answer to a riddle does surprise you, if you haven't been able to guess it.) "Why, yes, that's right, isn't it? A river has a mouth and never speaks, and a bed but never sleeps in it."

"Has Rocio River a mouth?" asked Artie.

"Of course it has," answered Polly. "It's somewhere miles from here, where the river empties into the ocean."

"And of course a river has a bed," said Margy, forestalling the next question. "Every one speaks of 'the river bed.' I think that is a pretty good riddle, myself."

Fred admitted that it was, and as his forfeit gave the bright red pencil he carried in his pocket.

"If we're going to redeem these forfeits and read the answers to the prize riddle, too, we won't have time to ask any more riddles at this meeting," Polly announced in her best official manner. "I can see Mrs. Pepper feeding her chickens from here, and she always feeds them at five o'clock, so it must be as late as that."

"Perhaps we'd better buy a clock for the club-room when we get dues enough," Fred suggested. "Won't there be time for me to ask my riddle, Polly?"

"There'd be time enough for that," said Polly, her eyes twinkling, "but not time enough for answers. We take *such* a long time to guess."

No one could deny this, so it was decided to redeem the forfeits hastily and then have the reading of the prize riddle answers.

"Close your eyes, Jess," commanded Polly. "This belongs to—well to some one," she faltered, remembering that the four forfeits might easily be identified if described too accurately. "What must be done to redeem it?" she concluded hastily.

"The owner must dance a jig," said Jess quickly.

She opened her eyes. Polly held her own badge in her hand.

"There isn't much room to dance a jig," said Polly cheerfully, "but I'll do my best."

And away she hopped, between the chairs and the table, managing to dance a gay little jig that won her scarlet cheeks and great applause.

"Now I'll try Fred," she said, when she had pinned her badge back in place. "Fred, what must the owner of this do to redeem it?"

She held Artie's knife above his head, but was too wise to let him feel it.

"Recite a poem," said Fred complacently. He was sure it was his own pencil Polly held in her hand and he liked to give recitations.

Polly burst into laughter as Fred opened his eyes.

"Poor Artie," she said, glancing toward her

brother. "You have to recite a poem, dear. Do you know any?"

"No, I don't," said Artie decidedly. He could never be coaxed to recite in public, not even among his friends. "The knife isn't much good anyway," he said, trying to make believe that he didn't want it back.

"You know we're only playing," Polly told him swiftly. "Here's your knife, Artie; we're only redeeming the forfeits for fun."

"Let me name the stunt," begged Margy eagerly, as Polly handed Artie his precious knife and turned again to the two remaining forfeits, Margy's handkerchief and Fred's pencil.

"What must the owner of this do to redeem it?" asked Polly, picking up the handkerchief, first making sure that Margy's eyes were tightly closed.

Margy was sure Polly held Fred's pencil over her head. She reasoned that she wouldn't try the trick of holding the forfeit over the owner's head.

"Here's where I make Fred mad," said Margy gleefully. Like all sisters she loved to tease her brother.

"Let him put his head out of the window and sing 'Three Blind Mice,'" she directed placidly.

"All right, but it isn't a 'him,'" said Polly.



"You're the one who has to do the singing."

It was impossible not to laugh at Margy's expression. Surprise, bewilderment and dismay were pictured in rapid succession. But she didn't beg off. Walking to the window she put her head out and began to sing.

Mrs. Pepper, still feeding her hens in the long, narrow runway for chickens a little to the right of the Larue place, looked up in astonishment, shading her eyes with her hand.

"Eh?" she called. "I can't hear what you're saying, Margy. Speak a little louder."

"'Who cut off their tails with the carving knife,' " warbled poor Margy, in her most tuneful voice.

"The wind's the wrong way," screamed Mrs. Pepper, "and I'm harder of hearing to-day, 'count of my bad cold. Does your mother want to borrow a carving knife? Why don't you come get it then? I can't climb up to that barn with it."

Polly pulled Margy back into the room. They were all shaking with laughter.

"She thinks I'm crazy," giggled Margy, mopping her hot face with the redeemed handkerchief. "I hope she doesn't take a carving knife over to Mother—we have a good one of our own."

Polly wiped her eyes. She had laughed till she cried.

"Wasn't it silly of me to leave Fred's till the last?" she said when she could speak. "Of course every one knows it is his. Next time I'm going to blindfold one of you and make you give all the penalties—the way they did last winter at Edna Martin's party."

"Don't give Fred his pencil unless he does something for it," urged Ward. "I think he ought to show us how to hoe lima beans."

A shout of laughter greeted this suggestion. Fred's one attempt to help his father in the garden was famous all over River Bend. It had happened two years before, when, as Fred was careful to point out, he was two years younger. Seized with a desire to be useful, he had taken the hoe one afternoon and gone out in the garden, determined to hoe lima beans. He had hoed everything in sight with such good will that the first planting of lima beans in the Williamson garden were a total failure that year. Fred had hoed up weeds and vines, and if it had been possible to hoe up the poles, his father said, he might have dug them up by the roots, too.

"Take the pencil and pretend it is a hoe," said Ward, who dearly loved to play a joke on some one else. "The floor boards can be the garden rows, Fred."

"Well, I don't care, if you don't," retorted

Fred, and he got down on his hands and knees and faithfully scratched his way down a board to the door.

"That pays off all the forfeits," announced the smiling Polly, as Fred came back to his seat. "And now we can read the answers to Mr. Larue's riddle."

The children gazed respectfully at the little slips of paper which Polly shook out from the box.

"I'd better read the riddle first, I think," she told them, "in case any one has forgotten it."

Polly gave the prize riddle again:

"What word is that which by changing a single letter becomes its own opposite?"

Polly picked up a slip of yellow paper. Margy recognized it as hers.

"This says, 'Ben,'" Polly announced. "'Change a single letter and you have Bin,'" she read.

"That's mine," said Margy calmly. "It took me a long time to think of it."

"But I don't understand it," complained Jess. "What has changing Ben to Bin, got to do with the riddle?"

"You don't understand it, because it is hard," said Margy soothingly. "I changed the 'e' to an 'i' and that changed the word. Don't you see?"

Fred caught Polly's eye.

"I don't think it meant to change a letter that way," he objected. "As I understood it, we were to move the letters around in different places, if we had to; not take one out and put a different one in."

Margy had worked too hard over her answer to give in easily.

"I don't think that is the way at all," she declared. "Isn't mine right, Polly?"

"I haven't the answer," said Polly. "Jess has it. But, Margy, even if you have changed a letter, you haven't made the word its own opposite. Bin isn't the opposite of Ben."

"Well, perhaps it isn't," admitted Margy. "I don't know what the opposite of Ben is, anyway."

Apparently, the one who had written the next answer had also had trouble.

"I can't do it," Artie had written carefully, first in pencil and then tracing the letters over in ink.

"I couldn't, either," confessed Ward; "but I put down a word."

"Is this yours?" Polly asked him, reading from another piece of paper. "Is Boy your answer, Ward?"

Ward nodded. He explained that if you took the "o" from the word Boy and put in an "e," you would have bay.

Polly tried not to laugh.

"Do you mean a bay like a harbor?" she inquired. "Where ships sail, Ward?"

"Of course," replied Ward. "What other kind of bay is there?"

"You spell that 'b-a-y,'" Polly told him. "And bay isn't the opposite of boy, is it?"

"No; girl is," said Ward disconsolately. "But I couldn't think of a way to work that out, though I tried hard.

Polly read two more answers in quick succession. Jess had worked out a complicated criss-cross of words in the effort to prove that Fat and Thin were the opposites wanted. Apparently she had overlooked all rules in her desire to get opposite meanings. As for Polly's own answer, it was, as she herself owned, partly right and partly wrong.

"I knew it wasn't exactly correct," she said. "But Mother says always to try, even if you don't get things right the first time. I took 'billow' for my word and substituted a 'p' to make the word 'pillow.' But of course a pillow isn't the exact opposite of a billow."

"They're different, anyway," maintained Jess loyally.

"This last answer I'm pretty sure is the right one," said Polly, choosing the remaining slip of

paper. "I'll read it and then Jess will tell us whether it is or not."

"Supper!" called Mrs. Pepper loudly from her back door.

"Jess! Ward! Your mother wants you," cried Mr. Larue from the back porch.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A SPECIAL MEETING

"READ it, quick!" implored Jess. "I have the answer right here in my blouse pocket."

Polly read the slip so fast, the words were almost tangled.

"'United is the word,' " read Polly, "'because if you change the places of the 'i' and 't', it becomes Untied.' "

"I don't see it, I don't see it at all," spluttered Margy. "Whose answer is that?"

"Fred's," replied Polly. "Is it right, Jess?"

"Yes, that's right," said Jess, holding up the paper on which her father had written the word United.

"Jess! Ward!" came the warning call again.

"How did you guess it, Fred?" asked Jess, letting the window fall with a crash as the club members began to move toward the door.

"Oh, I studied over it and *studied* over it and STUDIED over it," returned Fred. "There were lots of words in which you could change a



single letter, but they didn't make exact opposites. And then, last night, I thought that perhaps it didn't mean to put in a different letter, but change the position of one already in."

They were climbing down the ladder now, Ward having locked the clubroom door.

"I guess I was just lucky," said Fred modestly. "Sometimes when you think hard about a thing like that the answer comes to you."

"You said you were going to win it, and you did," Polly reminded him. "I think it was an awfully hard riddle. You must have done a heap of thinking, Fred, to get it right."

Mr. Larue thought so, too. He gave Fred his dollar the next morning and said he knew he had spent much time and had refused to be easily discouraged.

"Perseverance and patience will help us out nearly every time, Fred," finished Mr. Larue, as he gave Fred a brand new, clean dollar bill. "And I think you have both. The Riddle Club ought to be proud of you."

Fred, to every one's surprise, insisted on changing his dollar into four quarters and dropping these into the bank along with the club dues.

"For expenses," he said. "Or the clock, if we buy one."

"But that was your own prize money," pro-

tested Polly. "You had a perfect right to buy something just for yourself."

"I'd rather have it in the club bank," said Fred.

The same morning that Fred received his dollar, Polly arrived at the schoolhouse nearly bursting with suppressed excitement. During her writing lesson we grieve to tell you, she wrote five little notes and managed to distribute them at recess time.

"A special meeting of the Riddle Club is called for this afternoon, at half-past three, in the club-room," the notes read. "The business is IMPORTANT. We can't stay long, because I have a music lesson at four."

"Why on earth do we need a special meeting, Polly?" asked Jess, as the two girls walked home that noon. "Can't you tell us what it is about now?"

"Yes, I could," said Polly mysteriously. "But that wouldn't be businesslike. It won't take ten minutes after school."

You may be sure that no member was absent when the "special meeting" was called to order at half-past three that afternoon. Each one was curious to know what Polly had to tell them.

"Last night," said Polly, wasting no time, but

plunging into her topic at once, "I was telling Daddy about the prize riddle and how Fred won it. He said you must have lots of patience, Fred," she told the pleased prize winner.

"Well," she went on, "Daddy said he liked the idea of prizes for hard riddles and he offered to give us one; and he will pay a dollar to the one who solves it correctly, just as Jess's father did. I told him that we wouldn't have another meeting for three weeks, and he said that was too bad, because we could be working on his riddle for next time."

"And then Mother said we could have a special meeting," chimed in Artie. "She told me this noon. And this is it, isn't it, Polly?"

"Yes, this is the special meeting," replied Polly. "And I'll read you the riddle right away, for I have to change my blouse before Miss Robertson comes. You're to write this riddle down and hand in the answers at the next meeting, just the way we did yesterday."

Five pairs of eyes waited expectantly. This riddle-guessing was great fun.

"It's poetry," said Polly proudly. "This is it: 'From a number that's odd, cut off the head; it then will even be. Its tail, I pray, next take away; our mother then you'll see. What number is it?' "

"Now, there," remarked Margy confidently, "is one riddle I'll never guess."

"I think it's easier than it sounds," Polly declared wisely. "Anyway, I'm going to work my head off and see if I can't solve it."

"Carrie Pepper will say you'll win the prize because you have the answer," said Jess. "I hope she knows Fred won the prize, because if I had, she never would admit I won fairly."

"Carrie isn't so bad," announced Ward. "When she isn't talking, she's all right. She'd like to join our club."

"Don't forget to try to solve the riddle," Polly hurriedly reminded them. "I have to go now and get ready for Miss Robertson. Music lessons are a nuisance."

Although she might not have admitted it, Polly was not anxious to talk about Carrie Pepper. She knew the girl wanted to join the Riddle Club, and indeed there were half a dozen boys and girls eager to join. Polly was a hospitable soul, but she was wise for her eleven years, and she could guess with fair accuracy what would happen if more members were admitted to the Riddle Club.

"You see, Jess," she told her chum the next morning, as they walked to school—Margy had gone early to submit some special home work to the teacher, "the minute we let more in, the club-

room is going to be too small. I've told Carrie that."

"Yes, and we'll have to meet around at different houses," said Jess. "That isn't any fun. Some mothers won't let you make a bit of noise in the house."

"We couldn't make the racket in any house that we do out in your barn," declared Polly honestly. "That's why it is so nice to have the clubroom there; we can laugh and sing and the boys stamp around and no one gets nervous. But you know yourself, Jess, we can't get one more person in that room."

"Margy says if we hang up cretonne curtains this winter we'll have to drop one member," giggled Jess. "There isn't room for a single stick more of furniture, or a yard of drapery; of course we can't have a mob of new members."

"If we could squeeze in one, that wouldn't help the trouble," said Polly. "There are at least seven I can count who want to join; they think we're 'stuck up' because we won't ask them."

"Let 'em think," returned Jess cheerfully. "You don't care what they say, do you, Polly?"

"No-o," said Polly slowly. "I don't exactly care. But I would rather they said nice things."

Unfortunately, some of the children in the River Bend school were so anxious to become

members of the Riddle Club that they didn't say "nice things" when Polly tried to explain that the clubroom was too small to accommodate a larger attendance. It was not because they were anxious to guess riddles—Carrie Pepper, for instance, did not like riddles at all or guessing contests of any kind—but it was plain to be seen that the Marlays and the Larues and the Williamsons were having a very good time with their club. They wore their badges and seemed to have secrets and, alas, were perfectly contented. It is very sad, but very true, that some people are so made that they envy any one else who seems to be quite happy.

Polly hoped that Carrie and her friends would forget about the club after a while, and for a week or two they apparently did. That is, they no longer asked why they couldn't belong or teased to be told what had happened at the first meeting.

There really was not much time to argue over anything, as a matter of fact, for it was time to think about June examinations and the exercises for Flag Day which, of course, was the fourteenth of June.

"I'm going to play," announced Polly excitedly, rushing into the house one afternoon. "I'm going to play a patriotic medley, Mother. Good-

ness, I must practice every day, because there isn't much time."

Jess was to be in the chorus of girls who sat on the stage, a desirable place to be if you didn't have to stand there all alone and sing, she thought. And Margy was to give a dialogue with Fred. He didn't like this at all, for he detested speaking in public, though he would and did recite dozens of foolish rhymes to amuse his friends.

"It doesn't matter at all what you like, Fred Williamson," his teacher announced grimly. "You've been in this school five years, and every year you've managed to wriggle out of a place in the exercises. You learn your part and don't dare miss a line of it."

After that, of course, there was nothing to do but meekly learn his share of the dialogue. Fred told Margy it was all her fault that he had to stand up on the platform and "look silly."

"I don't see why it is my fault," retorted Margy. "Can't you help looking silly?"

"That isn't what I mean," grumbled Fred. "It's because we're twins. I wouldn't have to speak a dialogue with you, if you weren't my twin sister."

Mr. Williamson overheard him and laughed.

"I should say it must be quite as hard on Margy



to be your twin sister, Fred," he remarked. "If I were you, I'd stop complaining and learn my part. Flag Day will be over before you know it, and you may not have to recite again for a year."

"That's so," said Fred, brightening. "Vacation will come, and then, when school opens in the fall, there won't be a holiday before Columbus Day."

The prospect of a long time before the next school holiday so cheered him that he bent all his energies to learning his part of the dialogue. He would call Margy at most inconvenient moments to "practice" with him, and before the day arrived she was heartily sorry she had ever agreed to speak with him.

"Fred always wants to recite when I'm busy, Mother," Margy complained. "He woke me up this morning, pounding on the door, when I was getting dressed."

"Huh! if you were dressing yourself while you were still asleep, you ought to have been waked up. Anyhow, you have to know the dialogue by heart," cried Fred. "I'm not going to get up there and flunk."

Polly diligently practiced her patriotic medley, and her father declared that he never approached the house without wondering if he had been mis-

taken in the calendar and had reached the Fourth of July without knowing it.

Artie had no Flag Day troubles at all—he would only be expected to sing with his class.

Ward was also carefree. Ward had been selected to recite "The Battle Cry of Freedom" on one memorable occasion and had arrived ten minutes late at school after sprinting from his house at terrific speed. As a result, he appeared on the platform totally out of breath, and when he opened his mouth to give the "Cry," such a funny little squeak came from him that the audience was quite unable to keep from laughing. They were most polite and tried hard not to give way, but as Ward continued to stand there, squeaking frantically, some one snickered, and that was the signal for the release of a burst of laughter that shook the auditorium. That was Ward's last appearance as a public speaker. The other boys told him he was lucky.

"I wish I could get out of breath," said Fred gloomily.

## CHAPTER XVI

### FLAG DAY

FLAG DAY came at last, a beautiful, clear, sunny day. The exercises were to be in the morning, immediately following the assembly, and the girls wore their white dresses to school, each with a shoulder knot of red, white and blue ribbon.

"What a lovely dress, Polly," said Jess, when she saw Polly come out of the house and run down the steps to meet her. "Doesn't she look nice, Margy?"

"She always looks nice," answered Margy loyally. "Did your mother make that dress, Polly?"

"Yes," answered Polly, nodding her head. "And I pulled all the basting threads. She embroidered the flowers on the waist, too."

Polly's dress was simple, but, as Jess had said, very pretty. Mrs. Marley loved to sew and she made most of Polly's frocks. This white dress had tiny open-work daisies embroidered on the blouse and the hem and edges of the sleeves were hem-stitched by hand.

The school seemed buzzing with excitement

when they reached the building. Flag Day exercises were held every year, but the day never began like other mornings. For one thing, there were dozens of little girls rushing about in white dresses and dozens of boys wandering around, very neat as to clothes and well-brushed as to hair. Though the principal always requested that the children be as quiet as possible, they all sounded like bees and apparently all talked at once.

"Where's my music?" "Have you seen my flag?" "Where did you put the book with that poem in?" "I want to look at it again." This was what you heard as soon as you entered the main hall.

"Here's Polly!" cried the girls in her room, as she went upstairs.

And they crowded around her to exclaim over her dress and ask her if she was "afraid" to go out on the platform and play on the grand piano.

Jess was in Polly's room, but Margy was a grade lower, and her room was across the hall. She was backed into a corner listening to Fred, who had determined to go through the dialogue "once more," when Jess rushed in.

"Margy!" she cried, swooping down upon the twins. "The most awful thing has happened to Polly!"

"Is she hurt?" demanded Margy. "Where is she? What happened?"

Fred, too, looked alarmed.

"Did she fall downstairs?" he asked.

"There's nothing the matter with *her*," said Jess. "But her dress—well, that's just ruined!"

Fred looked relieved and Margy more anxious than ever.

"Her lovely dress!" she cried. "What happened to it, Jess?"

"Come on and say 'I am proud to hold this banner,' " urged Fred. "Girls are so funny—Polly has other dresses, hasn't she?"

"That's the only dress she has on," said Jess heatedly. "And the exercises begin in ten minutes. She hasn't time to run home and change it."

"I'm going," announced Margy. "Where's Polly?"

Leaving Fred to shake his head over the queer notions of girls, Margy and Jess hurried back to the latter's classroom. They found Polly in the cloak room, crying.

"Polly darling, what's the matter?" asked Margy, alarmed. Polly so seldom cried.

Polly stood up and turned her back.

"Look," she sobbed.

The back of her pretty dress was spattered with

ink. On the blouse and skirt were great blots that looked as though some one had taken a paint brush filled with ink and touched Polly in a dozen places.

"How can I go out and sit on the piano bench looking like this?" cried poor Polly.

"What did it?" asked Margy, puzzled. "I don't see how you could get ink on the *back* of your dress, Polly."

"Carrie Pepper did it," scolded Jess. "She says it was an accident, but I bet she did it just to be mean. She was trying to get the cork out of a bottle of ink, and it came out suddenly and the ink went on Polly."

"It was an accident," affirmed Polly. "I don't like Carrie any better than you do, but I know she wouldn't do a thing like that purposely."

"Polly won't tell Miss Elliott, because she's afraid she will scold Carrie," said Jess. "I don't see what we're going to do. Polly has to play the first one."

"If you ask to go home and change your dress, Miss Elliott will have to know what happened," said Margy thoughtfully. "And she'll have to change the program and she hates to do that."

"Polly could have my dress, for it doesn't matter what I wear," declared Jess. "I sit down all the time, anyway, and no one will see me. But

I'm so short Polly would be a sight in this," and she looked sadly at her soft, white frock.

"You can have my dress, Polly," said Margy quickly. "I'm as tall as you are, so it ought to be just right."

"But you have to go on the platform yourself," argued Polly. "I won't take your dress. Perhaps I can wear a shawl or something over this."

"Polly, you can't!" said Margy. "You can't keep a shawl over your back and play, too; it will slip down. Besides your back is to the audience all the time, and when I recite they'll see only the front of me. Hurry up and let's change, for the bell will ring in a second or two."

Polly finally yielded, because she could not think of a better plan. She knew that she could never play a note if she felt the eyes of her audience on the back of her ink-stained dress. Margy's frock fitted her perfectly and Margy laughingly declared she had the better of the bargain.

"Your dress is prettier than mine," she told Polly affectionately, "and people will see only the front of me."

The assembly bell clanged at that moment and Margy had to dash for her own room. Carrie Pepper was surprised to see Polly in another dress, but vastly relieved, too. Many of the girls thought she had spattered the ink purposely, but



as a matter of fact she had been perfectly truthful when she insisted it was an accident. Unfortunately, Carrie had scolded so much and so often about Polly and the Riddle Club that she was to find it difficult to convince even her own friends that she had not been to blame in the ink episode.

"I certainly am glad she didn't tell Miss Elliott," thought Carrie, as the class marched to the auditorium. "She's cross enough now without a thing like that worrying her."

Carrie wondered where Polly had found another dress so quickly. She was far from suspecting the truth. But Margy, marching along in another line, was only too conscious of the exchange.

"Margy!" whispered the girl behind her. "Oh, Margy, did you know you had ink stains all over your dress? It's a sight!"

"That's all right," mumbled Margy. "I like it that way."

"Margy Williamson!" came a shrill whisper from the girl marching in another line. "You ought to see your dress! You can't go out on the stage and recite like that! Why, you must have spilled a whole bottle of ink down your dress."

Margy had not known before that so many people looked at her back. It seemed to her that no one saw the embroidered daisies on her blouse while the whole school must be staring at the ink

spots. She was thankful when they reached the auditorium and she could drop into a seat.

"I thought we'd be nearer the platform," she said to herself in dismay. "How can I ever get up there without every one seeing me?"

The more she thought of the long walk up the aisle, the more she wished she needn't recite at all. She envied Jess, who was smiling at her from the chorus, packed cozily in chairs on the platform. They didn't have to get up and move around.

Margy felt better when she saw Polly come out and play the medley. Polly was smiling and self-possessed and she sat down at the piano and rattled off the patriotic airs with a spirit and deftness that made the audience clap her heartily. Margy knew she could never have done it, if she had worn the ink-spotted dress.

"I could manage all right if there was some way of getting up there," said Margy, while the chorus sang "America" with right good will.

The seat next to Margy, on the aisle, had been vacant till this moment. Now a teacher, from one of the upper grades, dropped into it. Margy's fascinated eyes rested on the rose-colored sweater or shawl—she could not tell which—in her lap.

"If I had a shawl——" Polly had said.

The principal stepped to the edge of the platform.

"A dialogue is next on our program," he read. "Fred and Margy Williamson."

Margy rose to her feet. As she went past the teacher she shut her eyes—and took the shawl. She could hear the teacher gasp, but she fled up the aisle, spreading the rose-colored wool over her back as she went. It was a shawl, she discovered, and so, much better than a sweater.

Polly, who had stepped down to her place in the auditorium, saw the rose-colored soft wool that almost hid the ink spots. She was glad generous little Margy had managed to borrow something. Margy was so excited she hardly knew what she was saying. Fred looked at her in amazement—he hardly knew his sister. He didn't know that she had changed dresses with Polly, for all dresses looked alike to Fred. But he knew something had happened to her.

"'The flag to me means liberty,'" began Margy, with the reddest of cheeks.

The shawl slipped to the floor as Margy and Fred went on, but Margy paid no attention. Whatever she did, she did with her whole mind and heart and the shawl was forgotten till the dialogue was over. Then, as the audience clapped

loudly, the little girl made a step backward, grabbed up the shawl and marched down to her seat, hoping that she had succeeded in hiding the ink spots from the eyes of the chorus and the principal and visitors seated on the platform. She forgot that they had had an excellent view of the back of her dress while she recited.

The teacher from whom Margy had "borrowed" the shawl stared at her as the borrower slipped past her into her place. She did not seem to be angry—she was probably too surprised for that. It was impossible for Margy to explain until the program was over, and then the teacher went out quickly during the last song. She had to oversee the marching of her own class as they went back to their classroom.

It seemed to Margy and Polly that a morning had never been so long before. They couldn't trade dresses again, for Polly was in one room and Margy another, and it gave Margy much uneasiness to think what she would have to do or say if she should be called upon to go to the blackboard.

Fortunately she did not have to leave her seat, though of course every girl in the room knew there was something the matter and most of them were anxious to know how the ink stains had come to be on Margy's dress.

"That isn't the dress she wore to school this morning, either," one said to another. "I do think it is the queerest thing!"

The moment the noon dismissal bell sounded, Margy bounded away, and she and Polly raced home to tell the news of the accident.

"For it was an accident, Mother, I know it was," said Polly earnestly. "And Carrie was sorry, too."

Mrs. Marley was also sorry, for the pretty dress was ruined, she said. The ink stains might be removed, but it would take a long time and the material might be injured. Still she said she knew it was an accident and that it might easily happen to any one.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE NEW CLERK

"WHERE did you get the shawl, Margy?" asked Polly, as the three girls walked back to school after lunch.

Jess was eager to hear that question answered, too.

"I borrowed it," returned Margy, laughing. "And I don't know who loaned it to me, either. It was some teacher—the one who has the eighth grade. Isn't she new this year? I think some one said her name was Miss Jorsan."

"Yes, if she has the eighth grade, that's her name," said Polly. "Did she wear glasses?"

Margy thought she did.

"I'll have to go and tell her," she said thoughtfully. "She must think I am crazy, snatching her shawl up that way—but I didn't think about taking it until I was starting for the platform."

"We'll go with you," offered Polly, and so the three friends went in search of Miss Jorsan.

She was in her room, and they had time to tell

her the whole story before the bell summoned the afternoon classes.

"So that's it!" said Miss Jorsan, smiling. "I couldn't understand why you took the shawl as you did. I must say, you're a quick-witted little girl, Margy Williamson, and if you and your friends stick together as closely through school as you do now, you ought to be able to solve whatever troubles you meet."

Margy meant to tell Fred her experience on the way home from school that night, but she found Fred so interested in a scheme that he hardly listened to her.

"What do you think?" he greeted her, as she came out of the school gate. "What do you think, Margy? Mr. Barrett is sick and Daddy says I can come down to the store next Saturday and help."

"Oh, I want to, too!" cried Margy eagerly. "I don't see why I can't go. Boys have all the fun."

"Well, perhaps Miss Harrison will be sick soon, and then, of course, you can go," Fred comforted her. "I'm going to take Mr. Barrett's place and sell socks and ties and shirts and handkerchiefs and maybe shoes."

Mr. Williamson kept the only department store in River Bend. Of course it was not a very large



store, for River Bend was not a large town; but if there was anything you wanted and could not find it in Mr. Williamson's store, it was safe to say it couldn't be found in River Bend. His stock was varied and exceedingly good, though naturally not so large as in the great cities.

There were four clerks in Mr. Williamson's store, and when it was a very busy day he himself made a fifth. There was Mr. Barrett and Mr. Todd and Miss Harrison and Mrs. Mundy, and they went from one section to another as the customer pleased, so in one day they may have covered several miles, just walking. Mr. Barrett happened to take a heavy cold, and that made Mr. Williamson short of help. Saturday was his busiest day.

If there was one thing the twins longed to do, it was to go back of the counters in their father's store and sell to customers. They were eager to measure off goods and show neckties and make sales. They longed to wrap up parcels and make change. They even wanted to run the little automobile that chugged around River Bend making deliveries and went far out into the country, taking packages to customers who lived on farms and often telephoned in to say what they wanted.

Of course Fred could not do everything that

Mr. Baret—who was a grown man and had worked several years in Mr. Williamson's store—could do, but his father knew he would be happy, just spending his Saturday in the store, and there were really a number of ways in which he could be useful.

"I'm going to be Mr. Todd's assistant," chattered Fred, "and I can answer the telephone and wrap up things, besides selling them."

"I'm coming down to see you," promised Margy.

And when Fred told the others, they said they were coming, too.

"I'm going to ask Mother to let me buy the things she wants," declared Artie. "She said I needed a new pair of shoes the other day. Could you sell me a new pair of shoes, Fred?"

Fred was sure he could.

"I wish it was Saturday now," he said wistfully.

But Saturday came at the end of the week, as usual, and Fred felt very important as he walked down to the store with his father as soon as breakfast was over. He knew the clerks and they knew him, and he was familiar with the store because he had often been there to see his father. But he had never been allowed actually to work there before.

"Well, well, so you've come to help us out of a hole, have you?" said Mr. Todd, beaming on the boy when he saw him.

Mr. Todd was a little, middle-aged man, with gray hair and a gray mustache and gray eyes. His suit was gray, too, but he wore a beautiful blue tie. Fred liked him very much.

"Now I'll be busy for an hour or two," said Mr. Williamson, whose desk in the little office built under the stairs was littered with mail and papers. "Don't get in any one's way, Fred. Try to help Mr. Todd and not to ask too many questions."

The stock rooms, where the goods that were not unpacked were stored, was upstairs, but the department store where people shopped, was all on the first floor. Fred looked around and saw that the clerks were dusting off the counters and folding up the gingham covers that kept the goods clean and tidy during the hours when no one looked at them.

"If a boy—a little boy—comes in here to buy a pair of shoes to-day, Mr. Todd," said Fred, "do you think I could sell them to him?"

"Don't see any reason why you can't, Fred," replied Mr. Todd. "Have to begin sometime, if you're going to grow up and go in business with your dad."

Fred began to watch for Artie, but he was not to be the first customer. Two women came into the store first and asked to look at men's handkerchiefs. Fred knew one of them—she lived near his mother, but the other was a stranger. They looked at all the handkerchiefs Mr. Todd could show them and then went out without buying.

"I could wrap handkerchiefs up, if they'd bought any," observed Fred, who had watched quietly while Mr. Todd brought out box after box of handkerchiefs with initials and without initials, white and with striped borders.

"That's the way it goes," said Mr. Todd cheerfully. "If you can't make a sale, you try again the next time. Here comes some one who wants shoes; now you watch, Fred, and you'll be ready to sell a pair to your friend when he comes."

The man who wanted shoes had just started to try on a pair when Fred saw Artie enter the store and march to the shoe department. Artie was feeling very important himself, for this was the first time he had ever gone shopping for shoes without his mother or father. He had the money to pay for them, too, in his pocket. Small wonder that he was excited.

"Shoes?" said Fred grandly. "For yourself?"

Artie snickered. Then he climbed into one of the seats and stuck out his foot.

"I want a pair of low, tan shoes," he said. "Good ones that will last. And I'd like them to fit me."

Fred sat down on the low stool provided for the shoe clerk and began to unlace Artie's high black shoe.

"All our shoes fit," he assured his customer. "What size do you take?"

"I don't know," returned Artie. "But you can measure with the old one. That feels fine."

Fred went back where hundreds of white shoe boxes filled the space and reached to the ceiling. He hadn't the slightest idea of where to look for the kind of shoes Artie wore.

Mrs. Mundy, on her way to get a pattern for another customer, saw him standing gazing at the tiers of shoe boxes.

"Let me see that shoe," she said quickly, and she looked at the odd little marks in Artie's old shoe.

"You'll find those down on the next to the lowest shelf," she directed Fred. "Just keep trying pairs on him till you get one that's right."

Fred thanked her gratefully and went down on his knees before the next to the lowest shelf. In a few minutes he had found the low tan shoes and in another moment he was fitting them to Artie's active tan-stockinged feet.

"That feels queer," complained Artie, as Fred laced up the first.

"That feels queerer," he declared when the second one was on.

"They must be right," said Fred. "They're exactly the same size as your old shoes. I guess new shoes always hurt you."

"Well, yes, they do sometimes," Artie admitted. "But these don't hurt so much. They're just queer feeling and they make my feet look funny."

Fred looked. Artie's feet did not look exactly right.

"Stand up and walk," he heard Mr. Todd say to the man who was buying shoes a few seats away.

"Stand up and walk," Fred commanded Artie.

The small boy obeyed and nearly tumbled down. Clearly there was something wrong with the new shoes. He hobbled back to his seat and looked accusingly at Fred.

"They don't fit me," said Artie.

"They must fit you," Fred argued. "They're the right size. Look, I'll measure them with your others."

He held up one of the shoes Artie had just taken off and put its sole against the sole of one of the new shoes. They were the same length.

Mr. Todd had, by this time, sold his pair of shoes, wrapped them up and sent his customer

away satisfied. He came back and looked at Fred, who was sitting disconsolately staring at Artie and his feet with the new shoes on them.

"What's the matter, Fred?" asked Mr. Todd cheerfully. "Can't you seem to satisfy this young man?"

"He says they're not the right size," said Fred gloomily. "And they're exactly like his old ones. I measured."

Mr. Todd had sold Artie's mother shoes for Artie almost since he had been born. He knew what size shoe he wore as well as did Artie himself. Better, in fact, for Artie could only tell the size by the feeling of the shoes on his feet, while Mr. Todd knew the number.

He picked up the box from which Fred had taken the new shoes and looked at the signs and numbers and letters marked on it.

"That's your size, Artie," he declared. "Let me take a look at these shoes. Something must be wrong."

Artie obligingly stuck out his feet with the new shoes on them. Mr. Todd glanced at them and a twinkle came into his gray eyes.

"Yes," he nodded his gray head. "Just as I thought. Something is wrong."

Fred gazed at him anxiously. He wanted to be a good shoe salesman.



"What's wrong, Mr. Todd?" he asked hurriedly. "He said he wanted low, tan shoes and good ones that will last."

"These shoes will last—best your dad has in the store," replied Mr. Todd seriously. "Many a pair I've sold to lads who are hard on their shoes. Your friend won't make any mistake if he buys those shoes."

"But they don't feel right," protested Artie. "They look funny, and when I try to walk, they trip me."

"Do they now?" asked the interested Mr. Todd. "No, I shouldn't expect you to walk as you are; it's dangerous to try it."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WHEN SHOPPERS SHOP

FRED looked alarmed and Artie stared.

"Shall I get him some others?" asked Fred hastily.

"No-o, I wouldn't," returned Mr. Todd comfortably. "Perhaps you'll be able to make these all right. Don't you see anything the matter with them, Fred?"

"They look right to me," declared Fred sturdily. "Maybe something is the matter with Artie's feet."

Mr. Todd laughed and sat down on the stool, taking one of Artie's feet in his hands.

"I'll have to show you, I see," he said, unlacing the shoe. "There is nothing the matter with these shoes, except that the right one is on the left foot and the left one on the right foot."

Fred and Artie looked more astonished than ever. Then they laughed. They laughed so much that Mrs. Mundy called across her counter to know what the joke was.

As soon as Mr. Todd had changed the shoes, Artie declared they were a perfect fit. He wanted to take them home with him and show them to his mother.

"I did that same thing, Fred, when I first tried to sell a pair of shoes," said Mr. Todd kindly, rising and handing the shoes to Fred to wrap up. "There's a knack about getting shoes right, as everything else."

Fred wrapped up the shoes and gave them to Artie. Then he went back to the cage where the bookkeeper, who was also the cashier, gave him the change. Artie had paid for his shoes with a five-dollar bill.

"I had a lot of fun, Fred," said Artie, going out with his shoes and his change.

Fred did not like to be laughed at, of course; few of us do. He was afraid Mr. Todd would tell the other clerks and perhaps Fred's father and that the whole store would soon be laughing at him. But Mr. Todd told no one. He never mentioned shoes to Fred that day, and Fred decided that Mr. Todd was one of the nicest men he knew.

Artie and his package had not been out of the store long before Carrie Pepper marched in. She wanted black thread and white thread for her mother; a dozen collar buttons for her father;

two pairs of black socks, size ten, for her brother, and a yard of white batiste for the dressmaker.

"Hello, Fred," said Carrie, when she reached the counter where Mr. Todd and Fred were standing. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm working," Fred informed her proudly. "Is there anything I can show you, Carrie?"

"My goodness," said Carrie, much impressed. "Do you know how to sell anything?"

"He's a fine salesman," declared Mr. Todd.

Carrie put her shopping bag down on the counter.

"I want some black socks, number ten, lisle," she rattled off so quickly that Fred blinked.

He did not know lisle socks from woolen, but Mr. Todd, who was straightening rows of boxes, gave one a little push that sent it further in. Fred pulled out this box and there were the right kind of socks and the right size, ready for Carrie's examination. She took a long time to look at them, running her hand in each, as she had seen her mother do, and tossing several pairs around on the counter, though they were all alike. Finally she decided to take the last two pairs in the box.

Fred wrapped them up for her and she paid him. When he came back from the cashier's desk with her change, Carrie was frowning crossly.



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"I've lost that yard of white batiste," she said. "It was in my bag and now it isn't there."

"Are you sure you had it?" asked Fred, wondering what white batiste could be.

"Of course I had it!" answered Carrie. "Didn't I just buy it from Mrs. Mundy, not ten minutes ago? If you took it to play a joke on me, I'll tell you you'd better hand it back."

"I didn't take it," replied Fred. "I haven't even seen it. What does it look like?"

"It was wrapped up in brown paper, the same as the rest of these bundles," said Carrie, tumbling a half-dozen small parcels out of her bag. "Some one must have taken it—things can't walk off by themselves. Oh——"

She stopped abruptly as she drew out a handful of soft, white stuff she had found in the bottom of her bag.

"I remember now," she said. "I didn't have it wrapped up, because I want to show it to Miss Harrison and ask her what kind of lace to get. Well, it's all right, but I thought you were trying to be funny, Fred."

Fred stared after her as she walked across the store to the counter where the lace was kept.

"It's hard work, keeping a store, isn't it?" said Fred to Mr. Todd.

"I don't know as I would say that," answered



Mr. Todd. "It's like any other kind of work, Fred; it has its ups and downs. You want to learn to take what comes and never let yourself be put out or discouraged."

"Well, I'll try," Fred promised. "But I can't help hoping something nice comes, for a change."

Fred had his wish presently, for Mrs. Marley and Polly came in to do their Saturday shopping. Mrs. Marley said she had been intending to buy Mr. Marley some new collars for a long while and would Fred show her the newest ones?

Fred did, and moreover he sold her six.

"Handkerchiefs are very nice for husbands," he told her a little shyly, when the collars had been chosen.

"I'm glad you reminded me," said Mrs. Marley. "Polly, don't you think Daddy would like some new handkerchiefs with his initial in the corner?"

"Oh, yes, Mother," answered Polly. She was gazing at Fred with shining eyes. He didn't seem like the same Fred who went to school with her.

They bought Mr. Marley three beautiful linen handkerchiefs with his initial, "A," in the corner and before they were wrapped, Carrie was back demanding the dozen collar buttons she had forgotten to buy.

"Hello, Polly," she said, while Mr. Todd

counted out the collar buttons. "How's the Riddle Club?"

"All right," Polly answered briefly.

"When are you going to have more members?" asked Carrie.

"We can't have any more, at least not right away," explained Polly.

"You mean you don't want any more," retorted Carrie. "Well, some day you'll be sorry. I don't think it is much of a club, anyway," she added, as she received her parcel and walked off.

Polly and her mother finished their shopping and went home. Fred was so interested he didn't want to go home to lunch, but his father said that unless he sat down and ate a good meal, he couldn't go back that afternoon. Fred, between bites, told Margy all that had happened, and she asked him anxiously whether Miss Harrison looked as though she might be sick.

"If she'll only stay at home, I can go and help in the store, too," said Margy, when Mrs. Williamson asked why she seemed so anxious about Miss Harrison's health.

Fred hurried back to the store, and that afternoon he learned what a busy place it could be. Half the population of River Bend and nearly all the farmers who lived on the roads leading into it, shopped on Saturday afternoon. They crowded

Mr. Williamson's store and he came out of his office and helped Mr. Todd and Fred with the customers.

"They all want to be waited on at once," complained Fred, after he had handed a shaving mirror to a man who asked for a whisk broom and the whisk broom to the man who wanted to buy the mirror.

"But you don't have to wait on them all at once," said Mr. Todd good-naturedly.

He was just as serene and cheerful and quick and quiet, no matter how many people asked him to wait on them. Fred's father, too, seemed to know just what to do and where to find things. Of course they had both worked in the store for years, and that made a great difference.

"I'll wrap these things," said Fred to himself, finding a small heap of articles at one end of the counter. "Then they'll be all ready to give to the people when they come for them."

A great many of Mr. Williamson's customers bought things and went on without waiting for them to be wrapped. Then they stopped and gathered up their purchases when they were ready to go home. Fred thought he would surprise Mr. Todd by having his parcels ready for him.

He had six or seven neatly done up in brown

paper and tied with string, when Mr. Todd noticed him.

"Hey, Fred, what are you doing?" he asked, stopping with a shirt box under each arm and staring at the small boy.

"Doing up these things so they'll be ready," said Fred. "I thought it would save you time."

The twinkle began to dance again in Mr. Todd's gray eyes.

"It would save me time," he said slowly, "if the things had been sold. They haven't. I showed them and didn't sell them and haven't had time to put them back in the right places yet."

Fred gave up wrapping parcels and wandered out into the aisles. They were crowded, and he couldn't walk very fast.

"Fred! Fred Williamson!" he heard some one calling him. "I left the baby outside—won't you run out and see if she is crying?"

It was Mrs. Johnson, one of his mother's friends. Of course Mrs. Johnson didn't know that Fred was a clerk in the store—she thought he was waiting for his father, perhaps, or had come shopping with his mother. She didn't wait for him to explain, but turned back to the counter and went on with her buying. There was nothing for Fred to do but go out and look at her baby.

Outside the store there were half a dozen baby carriages and the babies were all exactly alike—at least Fred thought so. He had seen the Johnson baby only once or twice and he didn't remember her at all. For that matter, she didn't remember him—at least, none of the babies sitting in the coaches acted as though Fred was a friend. They simply stared at him.

Only one was crying. Not loudly, but a little, low whimper, screwing up its tiny face and looking very unhappy.

"Are you Minnie Johnson?" demanded Fred, bending over the coach.

The baby flung up a tiny hand and caught Fred's finger. Apparently satisfied, it began to gurgle and coo.

"Let go," said Fred gently. "I just wanted you to stop crying, you know."

He pulled his finger away. The baby let out a roar that made him jump. Hastily he thrust his finger back and the little hand curled about it again. The baby was lonely. As soon as it had Fred's finger safe, the crying stopped.

"I can't stay here all day," declared Fred. "I'll have to go and tell Mrs. Johnson you're crying. You must be her baby. I'll be right back."

But as soon as he pulled his finger away, the

baby began to cry. He tried it three times and each time the crying was louder.

"The only thing to do," said poor Fred, at last, "is to take you to your mother. I don't dare carry you, because I might drop you on the floor. I'll have to push you in the coach."

The baby was satisfied with this plan. It did not cry when Fred pulled his finger free and began to push the carriage through the doorway. When it saw the pretty things in the store, the baby clapped its hands.

"Where did I leave Mrs. Johnson?" said Fred to himself, rolling the carriage down the crowded main aisle to the surprise of the shoppers who turned to stare at him.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE RIDDLE CLUB'S RIVAL

FRED could not remember where he had seen the baby's mother, and if he couldn't find Mrs. Johnson, what was he to do with little Minnie Johnson in the coach?

He pulled the carriage in between two counters, because the store was too crowded to make pushing it easy or comfortable, and was looking about for the baby's mother when Jess and Ward found him. They had come to buy some things their mother wanted, and they were eager to ask Fred how he liked to be a clerk.

"Whose baby is that?" asked the astonished Jess, when she saw Fred. "What are you doing with him?"

"Him?" echoed Fred. "He's Minnie Johnson—I mean she is; and I'm trying to find Mrs. Johnson. She was here a few minutes ago."

Ward wiggled his fingers at the baby, who smiled, but Jess looked serious.

"That isn't the Johnson baby," she said earnestly. "I know Minnie Johnson—she has blue



eyes. This baby has black eyes, and anyway he's a boy; that is a boy's hat he has on."

Fred stared at the baby. He thought that all baby clothes were alike, but Jess was usually right. When she said something was so, it was.

"Then whose baby is it?" asked Fred. "And what shall I do with it?"

Jess was ready with a suggestion.

"I don't know whose baby he is," she said. "But you'd better wheel that coach right back; some mother will be looking for her baby."

This sounded like excellent advice, and Fred wheeled the coach back so quickly that he almost ran down Margy, who was just coming in the door.

"Fred Williamson, what are you doing?" she demanded crossly. No one likes to be almost run over.

"I'm putting this baby back," answered Fred, wheeling the coach into line just where he had found it.

The row of baby coaches were the same and no mother had yet come to look for her baby, so Fred reasoned that no harm had been done.

"There," he said in great relief, "that's done! And if that wasn't Minnie Johnson, then she isn't crying, for all the other babies are asleep or keeping still now."

Margy wanted to hear what he had been doing, and Fred had to go back to the beginning and tell her, while Jess went shopping and Ward listened with wide-open eyes.

"Your father wants you, Fred," said Mr. Todd presently, coming back from the cashier's desk. "He's in the office."

"Wait for me," Fred asked Ward and Margy, and he dashed off to his father's office.

In another minute he was back, waving a dollar bill.

"Dad says it's four o'clock and that he always makes a new man's day short," said Fred happily. "He says I needn't do any more to-day. He paid me this dollar for working and I have some more—enough to buy sundaes for us all. Where's Jess?"

They found Jess and started off to get Artie and Polly. And then, when all six were seated on the high stools at the fountain in the candy store, Fred told them everything that had happened to him during that long, eventful day. I am sure you will agree with him that it was an exciting Saturday.

Polly had not paid much attention to Carrie Pepper's, "Some day you'll be sorry," but she remembered the remark when Carrie came up to

her at recess the next Monday and began to talk again about the Riddle Club.

"I don't see why you won't let new members in," argued Carrie. "Aren't we just as good as you are?"

Polly flushed a little.

"Oh, Carrie, that isn't it at all," she said softly. "I've told you, and told you, there isn't room in the clubroom. It is a tiny, little room up in the Larue barn. We can hardly budge when we're all in and the six chairs to sit in. There isn't room for another person, truly there isn't!"

The warm sunshine had drawn all the children to the school yard and the members of the Riddle Club were seated on the doorstep, near Polly.

"No, there isn't a bit of room," said Ward. "Not a bit. It's my father's barn, and I ought to know."

"If you'd resign from the club, there'd be room for at least two more members," Carrie told him pointedly.

Ward was used to being called fat, and he only grinned.

"Well, I'm sure we don't want to belong to your old club," said Mattie Helms, a friend of Carrie's. "It isn't the only club in the world."

Polly looked troubled. She didn't like Carrie

Pepper much, but Carrie lived near—her mother's garden was directly behind the Larue barn. She and Margy and Jess often walked to school with Carrie.

Mattie Helms they did not know very well. Her family had not lived in River Bend long. She was about Margy's age and in her classroom, and Polly knew that she and Carrie were constantly together.

"We're going to have a club of our own," said Mattie Helms, tossing her head. "And it will be much larger than yours. We're going to meet every two weeks."

"Why, I think that will be fine," declared Polly. "What kind of a club is it, Mattie?"

"You needn't think you can join," Mattie informed her disagreeably. "We're going to be very fussy about letting people belong. Our club is the Conundrum Club. I think that's a better name than 'Riddle Club.'"

"I'll bet you can't spell it," said Artie indignantly, but Polly shook her head at him.

"Wait till you see our uniforms," said Carrie. "You'll be sorry you can't join."

"Uniforms?" repeated Margy furiously. "Are you going to have uniforms?"

"Of course we are," replied Carrie. "We may not wear them till next winter, because they're

hard to make; but we'll have the badges ready in a day or two."

"We have badges," declared Jess proudly.

"Ours will be nicer than those little home-made things," said Mattie. "Ours are going to be real badges; my father is having them made in the city for us."

"How many members are you going to have?" asked Fred, speaking for the first time since Carrie had joined their group.

"Well, that depends," said Carrie. "I don't want every one to join, of course; but I think we'll have twelve or fourteen. We can meet at different houses."

The members of the Riddle Club discussed the new club on their way home to lunch that noon.

"They'll have a good time, won't they?" said Margy wistfully.

"Not half as much fun as we'll have," answered Polly cheerfully. "Carrie and Mattie go away in the summer and there won't be any club; we can have meetings all summer long."

"But think of their badges—real made ones," said Artie. "I wish we could have real ones, too."

"Well, we can't," replied Polly rather shortly. "You know Mother said we mustn't ask for a

single new thing. Those radio sets are going to take a lot of money."

Six heads nodded solemnly. The Marley children and Jess and Ward Larue knew all about those radio sets. It had first been settled that the steamboat company was at fault and that Mr. Larue would have to pay for the missing sets. Then another employee had said that he saw one of Mr. Marley's men open a box and look at a set. The man admitted this, but declared he had turned away for a moment to get another tool. While his back was turned, the sets disappeared.

So the question was still undecided, and until it was settled, no one knew whether Mr. Larue or Mr. Marley would lose a thousand dollars, or whether, as some said, they would be obliged to share the loss equally.

"No, we mustn't ask for anything like badges," said Jess soberly.

"Who wants badges?" demanded Fred. "I like the ones Polly made for us first rate. As for uniforms, I think that's silly. Any time I have to wear a uniform to a meeting of the Riddle Club, I don't come."

The Conundrum Club created a good deal of excitement in school. Carrie and Mattie talked about it incessantly. They whispered together and whenever they saw a member of the Riddle

Club coming, they tried to get off in a corner, as though their secrets were too precious to be overheard.

"I never saw any one as silly as Carrie Pepper!" cried Jess one afternoon, in disgust. "She's making up a sign now."

"What does she want a sign for?" asked Artie innocently. "To tell her the way somewhere?"

"Not that kind of a sign," explained Jess. "A secret sign, you know. Only members of the Conundrum Club are supposed to know it, and they make it before they are allowed to come in to a meeting."

"They have a password, too," said Margy. "Mattie told me yesterday."

"Oh, what is it?" asked the curious Jess.

Margy said she didn't know and didn't care to know, but nevertheless the members of the Riddle Club couldn't help being curious about the rival club. In the first place, the pins were very handsome when they arrived. They were enameled with gold edges—an orange "C" against a black background. Seven boys and seven girls, the duly elected members of the Conundrum Club, were allowed to wear these pins. That they were boys and girls with whom the six chums rarely played, did not alter the fact that the new club seemed to have about everything it wanted.



"I am very glad your club is a simpler affair," said Mrs. Marley, when Polly and Artie told her about the pins and the password and the secret sign. "I think you'll have a better time in your little hayloft clubroom, with just the boys and girls you know best, than in a larger club. Besides, you know, school hasn't closed yet, and you still have considerable work to do. You mustn't let clubs make you forget that you want to be promoted at the end of June."

Miss Elliott, Carrie's teacher, said almost the same thing. The Conundrum Club had first come to her attention when Carrie passed the pins around during the geography lesson. Of course the recitation had been interrupted and the teacher was not at all pleased.

Later Miss Elliott had been annoyed by pupils here and there in the room holding up their fingers, crooked in odd forms. She did not know they were practicing the "secret sign" of the Conundrum Club. This sign was supposed to be given by forming the thumb and forefinger of the left hand into the letter "C," but as each member did it differently no one was likely to guess what the sign represented.

A few days after this Miss Elliott was startled to hear whispers of "See-see" coming from different parts of the room. She didn't know this

was the password of the new club, but she promptly commanded Carrie and Mattie and Tommy Brown and Joe Anderson to stay half an hour after school.

"If you wish to be promoted you'd better pay more attention to your lessons, Carrie," Miss Elliott told Carrie that afternoon.

But Carrie was sure she would be promoted anyway. And one morning she came hurrying to school, eager to see Polly. Carrie was the president of the Conundrum Club and she had something to tell the president of the Riddle Club.

"Polly Marley!" she cried, when she saw Polly just going in the school door. "Polly! Pol-ly! Wait a minute! I have something I want to tell you."

Polly waited. She supposed it was something about Carrie's club.

## CHAPTER XX

### CARRIE'S PLAN

"I'VE something to tell you, Polly," said Carrie again, as she tumbled up the steps.

"All right, tell me," answered Polly, who had come early to have a little extra time for a particularly obstinate arithmetic lesson.

"Come on upstairs and we'll talk," said Carrie eagerly. "It's ever so important."

"Now I never will get that arithmetic," thought Polly, toiling up the stairs after Carrie.

The classroom was empty, for it was early and the children who had arrived preferred the yard—they rightly reasoned that they would spend enough time indoors after the nine o'clock bell rang.

"You haven't anything you want to do, have you?" said Carrie, noticing that Polly glanced at her books.

"I did want to study a little," admitted Polly.

"Oh, bother study!" said Carrie airily. "Listen, Polly, this is what I wanted to tell you. You know the Conundrum Club?"

Polly's eyes began to dance. Carrie liked to talk and sometimes she asked rather foolish questions.

"Yes," said Polly, "I've heard of it, Carrie."

"I suppose you think you're smart," retorted Carrie. "But anyway, we had a meeting yesterday at Mattie Helms' house and we want to arrange a contest with the Riddle Club."

"What kind of a contest?" asked Polly, with caution.

"A riddle contest, of course," replied Carrie impatiently. "Like a debating society, you know. Each side could ask the other side riddles—I mean the members of the Conundrum Club could ask your members and your members could ask us."

"Oh!" said Polly thoughtfully.

"Mattie Helms' father suggested it," announced Carrie. "He said Mattie could have the contest at their house and he knew our side would win."

"How would he know that?" said Polly mildly. "We haven't had the contest yet."

"He thinks Mattie can do anything," Carrie declared. "She is pretty good at solving riddles, too. So is Joe Anderson. Well, what do you think about it, Polly? I promised to let Mr. Helms know to-night."

"Why, I want to call a special meeting and talk it over," said Polly. "There isn't any hurry, is there, Carrie?"

"I hate waiting and talking and fussing," replied Carrie. "If you say you'll go in, that's enough; then we can arrange the time and the number of riddles and everything like that later."

Polly had thought of something else.

"We have only six members in our club," she said. "And, Carrie, you have fourteen."

"We'll pick six to ask riddles and the rest can look on," decided Carrie.

Polly made up her mind.

"I'll do it," she said—"that is, the club will. You can tell Mr. Helms that. But as soon as you select your six, we'll have to get together and plan. We have a club meeting next week, but there won't be time for any extra work then."

"After school to-morrow here in this room," said Carrie, "we can talk it over here. School is so nearly over, we'll have to have the contest pretty soon, or some of the Conundrum Club members will be going away."

Polly agreed to have her Riddle Club meet the representatives of the Conundrum Club at half-past three the next afternoon in the schoolroom. Then she went to work at the arithmetic and had

the obstinate problem neatly solved before the assembly bell sounded.

"Carrie Pepper wants our club to meet her club in a competition," she announced that night, when Jess and Ward and Fred and Margy came over to sit on the Marley porch steps.

"What kind of a competition?" asked Margy, just as Polly had done.

"A hair-pulling contest, I guess," suggested Fred.

"Well, I don't like the boys and girls who belong to that club," said Polly frankly; "but I don't believe it will hurt us to match riddles with them."

"Good for you, Polly!" said Mr. Marley, who was coming down the steps and overheard her. "Contests, besides being fine fun, teach us to keep our tempers smoothed out and our wits sharpened up. Go in and win if you can, and if you can't, take defeat like good sportsmen. I'm going over to see your father a few minutes, Ward," he added, as he went down the walk.

Ward glanced at Artie.

"Radio sets!" said each with his eyes, but neither boy spoke.

They knew that Mr. Marley and Mr. Larue were still trying to adjust the loss for the missing radio sets. Until some settlement was made, the prospects of the Marleys or the Larues, or any

other family in River Bend, having a wireless installed was very slim indeed. Mr. Marley refused to order more until the difference was settled.

"Then let's match riddles and beat 'em!" said Jess vigorously. "When is this contest, Polly?"

Polly explained that they were to meet the Conundrum Club the next afternoon.

"Is it like the spelling bee we had last term?" Ward asked. "Will Carrie stand up and read the riddles out to us?"

"Dear me, no," said Polly. "Whatever put that idea into your head? The meeting will be held at the Helms' house and each side asks an even number of riddles. Carrie is going to choose six, so the sides will be even."

"I never went to Mattie's house," said Margy.

"Neither did I. And Carrie says Mr. Helms knows their side will win," said Polly, who couldn't help repeating that remark.

"Huh!" grunted Fred. "Some people count their chickens before they're hatched."

With which homely remark he went home, taking Margy with him and vowing to "show the Conundrum Club a thing or two."

The following afternoon, as soon as school was out, the members of the Conundrum Club were on hand. They had to wait fifteen or twenty min-



utes for the classroom to clear. It did seem that every one who had the slightest excuse for lingering, stayed.

Carrie waited, however, till the room was empty and then she marched in, the entire membership of her club following her.

"We don't know yet which six will be in the contest, so we all came," she told Polly, who looked a little surprised.

"We thought next Tuesday would be a good time to have the contest," said Joe Anderson quickly. "Will that be all right?"

"The Riddle Club meets then," Polly replied.

"You can postpone it, can't you?" suggested Carrie easily. "You can meet most any time."

Polly shook her head.

"No, it's our regular meeting, and we can't put it off," she said firmly. "We meet every three weeks, and it isn't fair to those who have been studying riddles to make them wait too long."

"But I told my mother we would want the parlor Tuesday," protested Mattie. "She'll expect us then."

Margy couldn't keep still.

"I don't see why you should set a date, without waiting to hear from us," she said crossly.

"Oh, I suppose another day will do," said Mattie, frowning. "When do you want to come?"

Polly saw Fred thinking up a retort and she hastened to head him off.

"How would Thursday do?" she suggested. "Or Friday? That would be better, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know whether we can have the parlor Friday," muttered Mattie. "But I'll see."

"We'll have it Friday, then," said Carrie quickly. "And it's understood that there are to be six on each side. Friday at four o'clock."

"Artie and Ward are too little to be in it," declared Stella Dorman unexpectedly.

"They're members of the Riddle Club," said Polly quietly.

"Oh, it's all right, if you don't mind," answered Stella. "It doesn't matter to us. I only thought you might say the reason you didn't win was because two of your members were too young to be of any help."

The meeting broke up with this tactless speech. Fred hustled Artie and Ward downstairs and out into the yard, still sputtering. Polly and her friends followed more slowly.

"There's no use having a contest, if we can't agree any better," Polly was saying, as they came out of the door.

"We won't quarrel, Polly," Fred assured her

earnestly. "We'll put our hard feelings into learning riddles and do our best to show the Conundrum Club that we don't need their sympathy."

"They are older than we are," said Ward, trying to be fair.

"Carrie is eleven and the others are twelve and Joe Anderson is thirteen," declared Margy.

"I don't care if they're a hundred," said Jess sturdily. "We can beat 'em."

But the next morning Carrie had something more to tell Polly.

"We can't have the riddle contest next Friday," she said hurriedly. "Mattie's mother had a note from Miss Elliott and it said Mattie won't pass unless she gets an awfully good examination. So Mrs. Helms told Mattie she didn't want to hear the word 'riddle' till school closed."

"That will be ever so much better," Polly replied cheerfully. "We'll hold it during vacation."

"But I'm going away—up to a girls' camp," said Carrie importantly. "I expect to go the second week after school closes."

"Then we'll hold the contest the first week in vacation," declared Polly. "Does Mattie want it at her house?"

"If she passes, she will," said Carrie. "But if she isn't promoted, I don't believe her mother will

let her even belong to the Conundrum Club. She says Mattie spends more time learning riddles than she does learning to spell."

So it was announced that the contest between the Riddle Club and the Conundrum Club was to be postponed till the Friday in the first week of vacation. The meeting would be held in the Helms' parlor if Mattie was promoted. If she failed to pass, Carrie Pepper might have the clubs at her house.

The news of the contest spread about school and soon every pupil was interested in foretelling the winner. The Riddle Club had plenty of friends who believed in the ability of the six chums, but the Conundrum Club members had many supporters, too.

"They have Joe Anderson on their side, and he can solve most any problem or puzzle you ever saw," said a boy to Ward.

"Well, we have Fred Williamson on our side, and he can solve the hardest kind of riddles," announced Ward loyally.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MORE RIDDLES

"THE Riddle Club will please come to order," said Polly.

The important Tuesday had come at last and the entire membership of the Riddle Club were assembled in the hayloft room.

"We have two special announcements to be made," went on Polly, in her best club manner. "One is, of course, the winner of the riddle Daddy gave us. The other is a brand new plan. Shall we have the announcements first, or ask the riddles?"

"Tell the news first," said Fred instantly.

"Yes, let's hear what it is," Ward seconded him.

"Go on, tell," said Artie.

But Margy and Jess shook their heads.

"I like to save exciting things to the last," declared Margy.

"It's lots more fun to keep guessing," said Jess.

Polly thought as Jess did, and there they were

—three for one method and three for another.

"We'll have to draw lots, that's all," said Margy. "I know how—you write down on three slips of paper Yes, and on three other slips No. Then we draw them."

"I don't see what difference that will make," objected Polly. "Three will draw a paper that says 'Yes' and three will draw papers that say 'No,' and we'll still be half for and half against."

"Oh!" said Margy. "I didn't think. I always do get tangled up on arithmetic. I was thinking there were seven of us."

This didn't make her plan any clearer to the others, but they said nothing. It was plain that Margy was doing her best to solve the problem.

"I'd just as lief wait till the end of the meeting to hear the 'nouncements," drawled Artie, and Polly patted him approvingly on the arm.

"That helps us out," she observed cheerfully. "Is there any more business before the club, or shall we have the program?"

"All the program we have is asking riddles," giggled Margy.

" 'Tisn't either—we have announcements," Jess reminded her.

"Madam Chairman," said Fred, rising and clearing his throat with a loud "hem" that secured him rapt attention. "Madam Chairman!"

"Yes?" said Polly, smiling charmingly and hoping that she wasn't blushing.

"I wish to remind the members of this club," said Fred, "that the dues are due and payable at this time."

Artie and his chair went over backward with a crash.

"All he thinks of is that ten cents," groaned the small boy, when Ward pulled him upright again. "I just bought a top and I haven't a cent."

"I'll loan it to you," offered Polly.

"How much have we now?" demanded Ward, when Fred had collected the sixty cents, not without difficulty, for Jess had knotted her dime and Ward's so tightly in a corner of her handkerchief that for a time it seemed as though they would have to remain there.

"One dollar and eighty cents from the dues," said Fred, consulting his account book, "and the dollar I put in for winning the riddle prize. We have two dollars and eighty cents."

"What are we going to do with it?" asked Margy.

It seemed a large sum to all the members and, like Margy, they thought it was about time it was spent. None of them had ever succeeded in saving such an amount except around the holidays when saving was in the air.



"I thought it would be nice to save up and maybe buy some pins like those the Conundrum Club have," said Fred.

"Why, Fred Williamson, I think that would be fine!" approved Polly.

"If I win Mr. Marley's riddle, I'll put it in the bank with the rest," promised Jess.

"That would give us three dollars and eighty cents, wouldn't it?" said Artie. "How much will pins cost?"

"Oh, a good deal," replied Fred. "But we'd need only six; the Conundrum Club had to buy fourteen."

"Well, we'll agree to save our money then," said Polly. "Now, if there is no more unfinished business, let's start asking riddles."

Polly knew, from experience gained in the two previous meetings, that the members of the Riddle Club liked to talk and that supper time might arrive before the meeting was ready to adjourn unless she hurried them a little at the start.

"You begin, Margy," she directed.

"Ward," said Margy to the fat boy, "when does a ship become like a heap of snow?"

"When it's painted white," said Ward promptly.

"You don't stop to think," complained Margy. "That isn't right at all."

"When it's on a bank?" asked Ward. "You know, when it goes aground."

"My goodness, you almost guessed it," said Margy. "One more guess, Ward. I thought you were going to give the right answer that time, sure!"

Ward thought for a few moments.

"A ship is like a heap of snow when it's blown by a gale," he said at last.

"Wrong! Have to pay a forfeit!" retorted Margy. "Why couldn't you think of 'when it's adrift?' "

"Oh!" said Ward. "I see. When it's a drift. Huh, I almost had it, didn't I? Well, Polly, here's a forfeit," and he took off his seal ring and put it on the table.

"Your turn, Artie," said Polly.

Artie sat on the other side of Margy and chose to ask her his riddle.

"What is that which is bought by the foot and worn by the yard?" he asked.

Margy looked bewildered and Polly laughed.

"Oh, Artie," she said, "you've got that the wrong way around. You mean to say, 'What is bought by the yard and worn by the foot?' don't you?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Artie agreeably. "What is, Margy?"

"If a riddle's too hard for you to learn, how do you expect me to guess it?" asked Margy. "I don't believe there is any such thing—bought by the yard and worn by the foot."

"Do you give up?" said Artie.

Margy nodded.

"Carpet!" said the triumphant Artie. "Forfeit, Margy."

"You don't buy rugs by the yard," objected Margy, "and they're worn by the foot—feet, you ought to say."

"Carpets aren't rugs and you buy carpet by the yard," Artie informed her. "Mother bought six yards of stair carpet in your father's store last week."

"Oh, all right—I'll pay the forfeit," said Margy. "Here's my middy tie," and she handed the crimson kerchief to Polly.

It was now Ward's turn to ask a riddle.

"Polly," he said smilingly, "Why is the Fourth of July like an oyster stew?"

Polly pondered for a few moments of silence.

"Because every one likes it?" she ventured.

"Grandma doesn't," replied Margy immediately. "She's afraid of punk and fireworks."

"No, that isn't right," said Ward.

"Fourth of July—oyster stew——" murmured

Polly, tugging at a lock of her dark, bobbed hair.  
"Oyster stew!"

"Something you eat," said Ward encouragingly.

"I know—crackers!" cried Polly. "You have crackers with stew and with Fourth of July!"

"Ward told you—that's no fair!" protested Artie.

"You can't have fire crackers in River Bend any more," declared Fred. "It's against the law. They'll only sell you fireworks and punk and silver snakes and caps."

"Ward, is that the right answer?" said Margy suddenly.

"Almost—yes, it really is," replied Ward. "The whole answer is, 'Because it is no good without crackers.' But Polly guessed it near enough."

"I never heard of such a silly riddle!" said Margy, in disdain. "Of course oyster stew is good without crackers; I'd rather have bread and butter with it, any time."

"Is this a debating society or a riddle club?" asked Fred. "Perhaps we'd better buy a clock with the money from our dues, instead of pins; if we had pins, we might scratch each other."

"I'm willing to pay a forfeit," said Polly. "Ward did help me—he said it was something to eat."

"Don't you dare pay a forfeit, Polly Marley!" said Margy affectionately. "You guessed that riddle fairly and squarely. Go ahead, Jess."

"I learned this one for Fred," announced Jess. "You have to have hard ones to ask him. What Christian name besides Anna reads the same, backward and forward, Fred?"

"Christian name?" repeated Fred. "Do you mean names in the Bible? There's lots of them I don't know."

"You know this one," Jess assured him. "You know a girl who has this name."

"What class is she in?" asked Fred eagerly.

"I won't tell you," retorted Jess. "You might guess right away."

"But I can't spell," mourned Fred. "I can't spell the words in the spelling book, so how can I spell girls' names?"

"You'll have to, if you guess this riddle," said Jess.

Fred devoted himself to thought for as long as three seconds.

"Is it Myrtle?" he asked hopefully.

"Is that spelled the same, backward and forward?" inquired Jess a little scornfully. She was good in spelling.

"Well, it might be for all I know," answered Fred, grinning. "How about Carrie?"

"I don't believe you're trying," Jess accused him.

"I am so! It isn't my fault if I can't spell," argued Fred. "Well, here's my last guess: Is it Vivian?"

"That sounds as though it might be spelled the same backward and forward," admitted Jess, "but I don't believe it is."

"No, it isn't," declared Margy, who had written it down. "Forfeit, Fred. I hope the Conundrum Club doesn't ask you to spell anything."

Fred said he hoped so, too, and he paid his forfeit with the "lucky stone" he carried in his pocket.

"Here, chick, chick, chick!" a shrill voice began to call. "Here, chick, chick, chick!"

"There—it's five o'clock!" cried Polly, a little vexed. "We'll have to hurry. I don't think we can ask any more riddles or redeem the forfeits. I want to tell you something and we haven't found out who won the prize riddle yet. Margy, won't you collect the answers?"

## CHAPTER XXII

### ANOTHER PRIZE OFFER

"SEEMS to me you're in an awful hurry," grumbled Fred. "I don't even know what the answer is, yet. How do you know it's late?"

"Mrs. Pepper—feeding chickens—you tell him the answer, Jess," said Polly hurriedly. She was hunting for the box in which she wanted Margy to put the slips of paper she was collecting.

"Oh, for pity's sake, how silly you are," the impatient Jess scolded. "Polly has something to tell us and I want to hear the answers to the prize riddles. The name is 'Hannah,' of course. That is spelled the same way backward and forward."

"What do you know about that!" was Fred's comment. "No wonder I couldn't guess it. I didn't know how to spell Hannah. What girl do I know who is named Hannah, Jess?"

Jess frowned and Artie giggled.

"Jess wants to find out if she won the prize riddle," said Artie. "You know Hannah Meloney, Fred; she's in the first grade."



"Never saw her in my life," argued Fred, but Polly asked so pointedly for the meeting to come to order that he decided to abandon his argument till later.

"I'm going to read the answers you've written for the riddle Daddy asked us," Polly announced. "And if you don't pay attention and stop talking so much Mother will call us to supper before I get through."

"We'll pay attention," promised the club in a chorus.

"The riddle Daddy gave us was poetry, you know: 'From a number that's odd cut off the head; it then will even be. Its tail, I pray, next take away; our mother then you'll see.' That's the riddle," added Polly, to make it all clear. "We had to guess what number it was."

She opened a folded slip of paper, the first she took from the box.

"You guessed ten, Margy," she said, glancing toward Margy. "That isn't an uneven number."

"Isn't it?" inquired Margy, apparently surprised. "Well, I never do get anything right in arithmetic."

Polly opened another paper.

"This is yours, Artie," she told her brother. "You think eleven is the number. How did you get that?"

"Well, if you cut off the head of eleven, you have one left and one is an even number, isn't it?" said Artie anxiously.

"I don't think your talking sense at all," complained Ward. "Where does that one come in?"

"If you'll write 'eleven' in figures, you'll see, Ward," explained Fred, who understood. "But an even number is one which can be divided, Artie," he went on.

"You can divide one into two halves," said the small blue-eyed lad.

"That isn't the right answer—don't argue," directed Polly, remembering the need for haste. "Oh, here's one right! Jess, this is yours."

"What number did you have?" asked Fred eagerly.

"Seven," said Jess.

"I had that, too!" declared Fred, and Polly opened the two remaining papers quickly.

"Yes, you did," she said to Fred. "And Ward had nine, which was wrong. I suppose you'll have to divide the prize," and she drew the crisp new one-dollar bill from the envelope into which Mr. Marley had slipped it.

"Let Jess have it," said Fred. "I won before, and once is enough."

"Then I'll put it in the bank!" replied Jess in-

stantly.) "Put it in the tin bank, Fred, and save it to buy pins with."

And nothing would do but she must cram it into the small slit in the bank in which Fred kept the club dues.

"What number did you have, Polly?" asked Margy curiously.

"Well, I had seven, too," confessed Polly. "But I didn't hand any answer in; I thought five answers would be enough without mine."

"I don't see how you figured out it was seven," said Artie, gazing with admiration at Jess.

"Yes, what makes seven the answer, anyway?" demanded Margy curiously.

"You tell how you did it, Jess," said Polly generously. "You wouldn't call it an easy riddle, would you?"

"I certainly wouldn't," returned Jess. "The way I guessed it was by writing down all the numbers, beginning with one, till I came to seven. I mean writing them out, you know; spelling them out, like S-E-V-E-N. I took the even as well as the odd numbers, because I couldn't be sure. And seven was the first one that made sense when you took the head off."

"What's the head?" asked Margy bluntly.

"Oh, my goodness, the first letter," said Jess, who, like some other clever people, had small pa-

tience with any one who couldn't see through a problem she herself had worked out.

"Take off 'S' and you have 'even' left," explained Jess, a little more calmly. "Then you take away the tail and that, of course, is 'N,' and that leaves you Eve. Then I knew it was seven."

"Huh, I don't see at all," protested Ward. "Eve isn't my mother—my mother's name is Amy."

"So is Jess's mother's," giggled Polly.

But Artie was as serious as Ward.

"My mother's name is Isobel," he announced. "You must have that riddle wrong, Jess."

"No, I haven't," she declared confidently. "Eve—in the Bible—is everybody's mother—Miss Jamieson said so in Sunday school. 'Mother Eve' you say—so there."

"I never heard Eve was every one's mother," Ward was beginning, when Polly cut him short.

"It was a hard riddle, and I think Jess earned the dollar," she declared. "So did Fred. And that's the right answer, so there's no use arguing about it. If you'll sit down in your chairs—stop leaning back against the wall, Artie—I'll tell you something important."

Three chairs came down with a crash—the boys dearly loved to see how far back they could tilt

without losing their balance—and five pairs of eyes were fixed attentively on Polly.

"You know the riddle contest we're going to have with the Conundrum Club?" she asked.

"Sure! The first Friday in vacation—that's a week from this coming Friday," said Margy.

"If Mattie Helms gets promoted," put in Jess.

"We'll have the contest, whether Mattie passes or not," said Polly. "But what do you think?"

Unconsciously they leaned forward, for Polly's voice sounded excited.

"Daddy says," said Polly, "that if we win the contest, he'll give us five dollars!"

"Honest?"

"Gee!"

"Let's show him!"

The Riddle Club shouted joyous approval of Mr. Marley's offer. They told each other they would win that prize or—or—well, perhaps they made some rash promises about what they would do if they did not win, but that was because they were so determined to guess the hardest riddles that might be asked.

"The thing to do is not to get excited, Daddy says," said Polly, just as her father's whistle sounded from the house. "Don't let them hurry us and don't get mad, no matter what they say."

That whistle meant that supper was ready, so

the forfeits were returned to the owners without ceremony and the meeting adjourned in haste.

The next few days were very busy ones for all the pupils in the River Bend school. The examinations for the grammar grades were not very many and should not have been difficult for those who had worked steadily throughout the year. But, of course, examination time is always more or less a period of uncertainty, and the last day of school brought unpleasant surprises to several pupils in every room.

The six members of the Riddle Club were promoted to higher grades with good term marks, and Mattie Helms also managed to pass, as did Carrie Pepper.

"So it looks as though we'd have the contest in the Helms' parlor," reported Ward seriously.

"We ought to celebrate," said Polly gayly. "Here we are, through school for two months and every one promoted. Let's have a picnic, or something."

"Let's go to the Grove!" cried Jess eagerly. "It seems perfect ages since I went on a Monday picnic!"

Polly and Margy laughed, but they understood. During the school year all picnics had to be held on a Saturday. It really did seem more interest-

ing to go on another day. Besides it made them realize that it was really vacation at last.

The boys were ready for any kind of an outing, and the three mothers thought the Grove was the nicest place to go to.

"Carrie Pepper and Mattie go down the river on the boat, Mother," said Polly, watching her mother put up sandwiches.

"Without Mrs. Pepper or Mrs. Helms?" asked Mrs. Marley.

Polly nodded, for she was tasting the salad dressing.

"I wouldn't want you to do that," said Mrs. Marley, cutting the crusts off a beautiful egg sandwich she had just made. "When an older person has time to go with you, the trip down to Lake Bassing makes a pleasant excursion; but no one could want a nicer place than the Grove and I never have to worry when you children go there."

When the six chums reached the field that separated the Grove from the last street in town, they couldn't march straight through. The daisies and buttercups and clover were so thick and fragrant, it would have been a pity to pass them by. When Ward and Artie sat down in the field the flowers almost covered their heads.

"Let's make daisy chains!" suggested Polly.



"Let's play Indian scouts and creep through the grass," said Artie.

"I want to see if Margy likes butter," Jess said, pulling up a fat buttercup by the roots in her haste to make the test.

"We've plenty of time to do everything," declared Polly comfortably.

So Jess lined them up and tried to find out whether they all liked butter or not. She held a buttercup under each chin, and, sure enough, a faint yellow shadow told that each and every one of them liked butter.

"I like bread, too," said Ward. "What shows that?"

"The size of you," his sister answered quickly, and Ward laughed as loudly as the rest. He didn't mind being fat at all.

"Now get all the daisies you can and we'll weave chains," commanded Polly, "and we can play Indian scouts going over to the Grove."

Each girl picked an armful of daisies and then sat down in the middle of the field to weave them—Polly knew how to do it and she showed the others—while the boys found a place where they could play leapfrog.

The sun was warm, but not too warm, and it was great fun to be in the meadow of daisies and buttercups.

"Hark!" cried Polly suddenly. "I heard some one call—didn't you?"

The boys stopped playing and all, boys and girls alike, listened silently a moment.

"There! I heard it again," declared Polly, putting down her chain and standing up. "But I don't see any one," she said, shading her eyes with her hands.

"Perhaps it was a bird," said Artie wisely. "Some kind of a bird in the Grove."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A GREAT DISCOVERY

"OH, come on, let's finish these daisy chains," said Margy. "You only thought you heard some one calling. I'll bet it was the train whistle—lots of times that sounds like a voice."

Polly dropped down again and took up her daisy chain.

"I know I heard some one, but it doesn't matter," she said, her fingers beginning to fly.

When the chains were finished, there was one for each. The girls looped them around their necks and were ready to play Indian scouts. Just as soon as they finished one thing, they were ready for another—that was one reason they were always busy.

"We have to creep through the grass so it hardly wiggles," directed Artie.

When it came to knights or Indians, settlers or pioneers, it was Artie who said what was to be done. Artie was always reading, and he really did know a good deal about history, for he re-

membered what he read. Not every one does that.

"Go single file," ordered Artie, "and don't stick your head up."

It was fun, and not as easy as it sounds. Margy, especially, found it hard to keep her head down, and, if Polly had not poked her frequently, she would have stood up and looked about her every few feet. Artie led the way, and the others followed, and if any one had been watching them from the houses on the street all they would have seen would have been a slight waving among the daisies—"wiggling," Artie called it.

"There!" he said, with satisfaction, when they had reached the Grove. "If enemies had been lurking for us, they wouldn't have caught us. I call that good work."

"It would have been better," Polly remarked, in a very matter-of-fact tone, "if we hadn't left the lunch! I thought Margy had it."

"I gave it to Jess," declared Margy positively.

"Well, I never had it," said Jess, quite as positively.

"Then you've left it back in the field," said Fred, "and we'll have to go back after it."

"I'll go," offered Polly. "I think I know about where we were."

Jess offered to go with her, and the others promised to wait.

"I'm going up to Grafton's and ask them if the sweet apples are ripe," said Fred suddenly. "They'll give us some, if they are."

They could see the chimney of the Grafton farmhouse from where they were. Fred knew the farmer, and the prospect of early sweet apples was worth the walk to the house.

"I'm going, too," said Margy, who liked to go wherever her twin went.

"You stay here," said Fred to Artie and Ward, "and if the girls come back, tell them we won't be long."

The shortest way to the farmhouse led the twins up a bank and into a lane. They scrambled up handily, clinging to bushes and dwarfed trees, and had almost reached the top, when Fred stopped suddenly.

"Listen, Margy!" he whispered. "Hush and listen."

"I say cut off the ear phones and sell 'em separate," said a hoarse voice.

Fred pointed upward to show Margy where the owner of the voice must be.

"In the lane," he whispered. "Don't make a noise."

Margy nodded to show she understood.

"You make me sick, talkin' ear phones," said another voice. "All I've heard for a week's been 'ear phones, ear phones.' What good are ear phones without radio sets?"

Margy looked as though she might tumble over backward at that declaration. Fred held up his hand, for he was afraid she might speak aloud.

"I've said all along the way to get rid of those sets is to sell 'em in parts," said the hoarse voice. "Sell ear phones one place, a battery another, and so on. What do you say? Want to try it?"

Fred began to back down the hill, very softly. Margy followed him. Though both were tremendously excited, they remembered to go quietly. Fortunately, there was little chance of being seen—the bank cut under sharply at the top and the lane was fenced off so that any one sitting or standing there would be some distance from the edge and not likely to peer over.

"Well, we thought you were gone for good!" Ward greeted the twins on their return. "Where are the apples?"

Polly and Jess were there, with the lunch, and they, too, looked expectantly for apples.

"Bother the apples!" said Margy, as though apples were nothing at all. "What do you think?"

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"Yes, what do you think?" chimed in Fred.  
"We——"

"I don't believe you even tried to get any," said Ward, his mind intent on apples. "They were ripe this time last year."

"Apples!" cried Margy in scorn. "What are apples?"

She flung out her arms as a relief to her feelings, not daring to shout.

"We found the thieves who stole the radio sets!" she squeaked.

"Found them?" asked Artie, staring at her. "Where did you find them?"

"Well, we heard them," said Fred. "They're up in Grafton's lane. They were talking about radio sets and ear phones and batteries."

"Yes, and they're going to sell them," said Margy, hopping up and down with excitement. "Come on, let's catch them."

The others were quite willing to catch the thieves. The only drawback to this plan was that they did not know how to start.

"We can't climb up that bank and arrest them," said Artie sensibly, "because we're not big enough to make them come back with us till we find Constable Griffin."

"Of course we can't arrest them," declared Polly. "But I'll tell you what we *can* do."



Polly's ideas were usually practical, and the others had learned to listen when she suggested something.

"Those must be the men I heard when we were back in the field," she said. "I was sure I heard some one calling. We can't arrest them, but we can follow them."

"Follow them? Oh, Polly, where?" asked Jess.

"Wherever they go, of course," answered Polly. "We mustn't let them see us and we must find out where they go, because if they're talking about the sets that means they haven't sold them yet."

"That's right, Polly," said Fred. "I never thought of that. They must have the sets somewhere and I don't believe it is far from here, either."

"We'll go down to the road and hide," planned Polly. "Whichever direction they go, they'll have to take the River Road—it's the only one."

"Well, can't we eat while we're hiding?" asked Ward. "I'm nearly starving."

"Here——" and Jess jerked open the box of sandwiches. "Take one. I never knew a boy who always wanted to eat the way you do," she complained.

But Ward was not the only hungry one. Those sandwiches disappeared between the Grove and the River Road, a short walk of less than a quar-

ter of a mile. Jess was hungry herself, though she would not admit it and was inclined to think she ate three sandwiches to "save" them.

"Here's a good place to hide," said Fred, when they reached the road. "Get under here and we can see the road in both directions and the field; too, in case they come across lots."

The place Fred had chosen was the culvert under a tiny stone bridge. It was such a tiny stream, over which the bridge was built, that the merest trickle of water flowed under it the year around except in times of storms or spring freshets. Then it became a really respectable-sized brook.

The six girls and boys huddled under the culvert and six pairs of sharp eyes scanned the Grafton pasture and the River Road which obligingly curved at this point.

"Here they come!" whispered Margy so suddenly that Polly jumped.

Sure enough, two figures were trudging along the road, talking together earnestly. As the children looked one man took off his hat and wiped his forehead with a gay-colored handkerchief. His oily hair straggled down almost to his eyes.

"Fred!" cried Ward. "Those are the tramps we chased out of the barn!"

"Well, you needn't tell them," replied Fred.  
"Don't shout so loud."

"I remember," said Jess, staring curiously.  
"Are you sure they are the same ones?"

Ward nodded. "Sure!" he said.

"They look pretty big," observed Margy.

"And they were the same ones we saw with the red automobile, when we had the picnic before school closed," said Fred.

"And they stole the radio sets!" declared Jess.  
"I know they did! I suppose they were in the crowd that came down to the wharf to see the *Fulton* dock and just helped themselves to the sets."

"If we don't hurry, they'll be out of sight," observed Polly. "They're going down to the river. Come on, we can keep out of sight."

If the men had not been so interested in their talk, they would surely have noticed the six little figures that dodged in and out behind the bushes and trees that lined the River Road. The members of the Riddle Club had never tried to follow two "burglars," as Margy persisted in calling the men, before and they found it hard to keep them in sight and keep themselves out of sight.

The men followed the road straight to the river, and when Fred saw that they were heading

for an old shanty on the bank, he whispered that it would be best to "lay low" behind a large rock.

"They're going into Murphy's place," he whispered, "and we can wait and see what they do. There's no use in letting them find us, 'way out here."

It was rather a lonely part of the country, at least two miles from the town, and no houses were near. The shanty had not been lived in for years. Margy shivered a little and Jess and Polly looked anxious.

"Suppose they bring the sets out with them, what'll we do?" asked Artie, as they waited behind the rock.

"They can't bring them all—there's too many of them," declared Fred.

"Sh! they're coming back," whispered Polly.

No one stirred—and they tried not to breathe—as the sound of scuffling footsteps came down the road.

"Well, it's getting hotter every day," one of the men said, as they passed the rock. "I don't intend to walk out here many more times. I say sell those sets for what we can get for 'em."

The children waited till the men had disappeared from sight. Then they ran for the shanty and wrenched open the door.

"There's nothng here!" cried Margy, in great disappointment.

"Wait—we haven't looked yet," counseled the wise Polly. "There may be something in that pile of stuff." Apparently it was trash left by the last tenant.

The six attacked the pile of rags and old papers heaped in one corner of the room.

"I've got one!" shouted Ward, holding up a set of ear phones.

"Here's wire!" cried Margy, dragging out a copper coil.

"I've found some!" shrieked Jess, uncovering a polished mahogany box with a handle and dial screwed on one side.

"Well, what do you know about that!" said Fred, beaming. "We've found them all!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### POLLY SPEAKS HER MIND

THE members of the Riddle Club stood staring at the array of sets and material on the floor before them. Then they went through the trash heap a second time, to make sure they had not overlooked anything.

"I don't believe one single piece is missing," said Polly happily.

"Now we'll have our radio!" declared Artie.

"And your father won't have to lose any money, or mine, either," said Ward comfortably.

"They'll come back and get this, if we don't hurry and tell some one," said Polly suddenly. "Let's go find the constable right away."

They closed the door of the shanty—afraid that if left open it might attract some one's attention—and started back to town. They ran till their breath gave out, and then they walked. The welcome sound of an automobile behind them while they were still a mile away from River Bend, suggested that a "lift" might be offered them.



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"Don't talk!" warned Fred hastily. "Don't say a word."

The automobile was the grocer's delivery wagon, and the driver cheerfully invited them to "pile in." They climbed in gratefully, and reached River Bend within a few moments.

"Let's tell Daddy, first," suggested Polly, when the delivery car had dropped them at the grocery store. "He'll know what to do."

Off they raced to the hardware store, but Mr. Marley was not there.

"I think he went down to the wharf," his bookkeeper told Polly.

So the six children, just bursting with news to tell, ran all the way to the wharf.

"Taken by Indians!" laughed Mr. Marley, as the six burst into the little office on the wharf.

"Couldn't you come one at a time?" asked Mr. Larue mildly, glancing up from his desk.

"Daddy! Daddy!" shrieked the Marleys and the Larues, while the Williamson twins bounced about like two rubber balls. "We've found the radio sets!"

"Radio sets?" asked Mr. Larue. "What are you talking about?"

Then they had to explain. But as soon as the two fathers understood, they were almost as excited as the children themselves. Mr. Larue

reached for the telephone, and in a few minutes the two town constables were at the office and in another five minutes a party had set out for the Murphy shanty.

Mr. Marley and Mr. Larue went with them, and Mr. Williamson, who was a deputy sheriff, went, too. But though the six chums begged to be allowed to go, they had to stay behind.

"Well, anyway, we found the radio sets," said Fred, as they walked disconsolately homeward.

"And if they don't catch the burglars, they'll be sorry they didn't take us," declared Margy.

The thieves were arrested and brought back to River Bend late that afternoon. The constables had waited in the shanty, sure the men would return. They had come back in the same red automobile the children had seen several weeks before and were loading the radio sets into a box strapped on the running board, when the officers of the law interrupted them.

"And the best and most expensive set of all goes to the Riddle Club for the clubroom," Mr. Larue announced that night. "We never should have found the stolen sets if you children hadn't kept your ears and eyes wide open."

"Gee, a set all our own!" sighed Artie blissfully. "Won't it be fun!"

"Now, if only we can win against the Conun-

'drum Club, I'll be perfectly happy," sighed Polly.

She took the coming contest more seriously than any of the others. It was partly because, as president, she felt responsible for the showing made by her club.

"And I do want to have our side win, because Mattie and Carrie are so mean," she confided to her mother.

"If I were you, I wouldn't think about them at all," advised Mrs. Marley. "It's never safe to waste time disliking an opponent. You'll have all you can do to think about the riddles being asked you, without fretting about what kind of girls or boys are asking them."

"Say, Polly," said Jess, the morning before the contest, "what do you think? There's going to be company!"

"Company?" echoed Polly. "Where? Whose company?"

"Carrie told me," said Jess. (There was never any use trying to hurry her.) "Mrs. Helms and Mrs. Pepper and Mattie's Aunt Anne and Mrs. Dorman and Miss Bowman, who is visiting Mrs. Dorman. They're coming to hear the contest."

"No one asked Mother," replied Polly, puzzled. "Perhaps we're each supposed to ask our mothers."

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"No, we're not," said Jess quickly. "Mrs. Helms says her parlor won't hold many; she just asked a few friends who are interested in Mattie."

"Oh!" cried Polly. "Of all the mean——"

Then she remembered her mother's advice.

"I'm rather glad our mothers won't be there," she said. "Then if we don't win, they won't feel so bad."

But Polly could not help feeling that it was rather unfair to invite the friends of the Conundrum Club and none of those who favored the Riddle Club.

Later she was glad that no more had been asked, for Ward and Artie balked when they heard there was to be an audience.

"That settles it!" Ward announced. "I'm not going to get up and try to guess riddles with a lot of strange people listening."

"No, I won't do it, either," said Artie firmly. "'Tisn't school, and I don't have to."

Mr. Marley heard of their refusal when he came home at noon.

"Look here, boys," he said, meeting them on the side porch as he came out after lunch. "You can't back out of the contest, you know; how is the Riddle Club going to win that five dollars, if you leave them in the lurch?"

"Can't the others go?" muttered Artie uncomfortably.

"Four against six?" Mr. Marley reminded him. "That wouldn't be fair. And the Conundrum Club has fourteen members from which to select their six, while the Riddle Club has no more members than it needs."

"Oh, all right, we'll go," promised Ward. "But I don't see why they had to tell a lot of people about it."

One thing more was to rise up to trouble Polly that eventful day.

"I suppose you've heard about the referee?" asked Margy, coming over after supper.

Polly shook her head.

"Well, Mattie says there must be a referee, to read the riddles and the answers and keep count," said Margy, "so she says Stella Dorman can do it."

"I thought Stella was going to answer riddles," replied Polly.

"She was, but she's going to be referee now," said Margy. "Winifred Sims is going to take her place."

Polly was not easily roused, but once she made up her mind, she acted.

"You come right along with me, Margy Williamson," she said, to her friend's surprise.

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"Where are you going?" asked Margy, obediently following Polly down the path.

"Down to Mattie Helms' house," said Polly, over her shoulder. "I'm going to ask her about the referee."

Mattie lived three or four blocks from Polly, and when they reached the handsome house, only Mr. Helms was at home. He sat on the porch. Mattie and her mother and aunt had gone to the movies.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked kindly. "Is there something you want me to tell Mattie?"

"It's about the riddle contest," said Polly uncertainly. "I wanted to tell Mattie that I won't agree to have Stella Dorman act as referee. She's a member of the Conundrum Club and she can't help trying to help them win. Not that I think she would mean to, but—well, I wouldn't let a Riddle Club member be referee in a contest like this."

Polly stopped in some confusion. She had forgotten she was speaking to the father of a Conundrum Club member. Margy said nothing at all.

"I understand," said Mr. Helms, still kindly. "You think a disinterested person should ask the riddles and check up. So do I, and I'll tell Mattie so. Now, let me think—who would be a good



person to referee such an important contest? How about Harry Worden? He lives across the street, and I think he'd be fair."

Harry Worden was a high-school boy and so much older than any of the riddle contestants that it was doubtful if he knew them by sight. They knew him, though, and Polly secretly thought he was the nicest boy in the River Bend high school. He would, she was sure, make a good referee.

"I'll go over and ask him now," said Mr. Helms, and he actually did, coming back in a few minutes to report that Harry would be present the next afternoon.

"I'm sorry I won't be here myself," declared Mr. Helms, shaking hands with Polly, "but the afternoon is my busy time. I wish you the best of luck, Miss Polly, and may the best team win."

"There now, that's settled," said Polly to Margy, as the two girls walked back to the Marley's house. "But I'll be glad when this contest is over."

Polly made this speech again, and Jess and Margy echoed it, when they entered Mrs. Helms' parlor the next afternoon. One end of the room appeared to be filled with people, most of them strangers and all of them beautifully dressed as though for a party. And when the Conundrum Club entered, fourteen strong, Margy gasped.

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"Mattie has on a new dress and so has Carrie Pepper," she whispered. "And the others are wearing their best clothes."

Margy and Polly and Jess were wearing pretty clean gingham dresses, but they were far from being "dressed up." As for the boys, they appeared to be comfortable in their school suits—Conundrum Club and Riddle Club alike.

Harry Worden seemed a little surprised when he came in, to find so many there. He had thought it was to be a simple contest between a dozen children, and perhaps if he had known older people were to be present, he, too, might have refused to come. But his word once given, Harry kept it to the letter.

"Line up, please," he said, in a business-like voice. "I think you'd better alternate, because I intend to ask the riddles that way. Polly Marley, you head the line—you're one of the presidents, aren't you?"

"I'm president of the Conundrum Club," Carrie informed him quickly.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE GREAT CONTEST

HARRY WORDEN looked at Carrie when she spoke. He did not know her.

"Then you take the other end of the line," he said pleasantly. "I'll write down your names as you give them to me."

Mattie Helms took her place next to Polly; then came Artie Marley, Stella Dorman (who had decided to compete after all), Fred Williamson, Ben Asher, Ward, Albert Holmes, Margy, Joe Anderson, Jess Larue and Carrie Pepper.

Harry wrote down their names in the order in which they stood, and just as he finished, Carrie asked a question:

"How many riddles are you going to ask?" she demanded.

"Why, I think six is fair," returned Harry. "Don't you? Each side to answer six."

"That means one apiece, and we each have to answer correctly to win," said Carrie thoughtfully.

"No, the side that answers the greatest number correctly will win," announced the referee.

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"Then I believe I'd rather have Edith Spencer than Stella," said Carrie calmly. "Stella loses her head too easily."

Stella Dorman flushed and looked angry.

"Don't stay in, if you're not wanted, Stella," said Mrs. Dorman, and Mrs. Helms was heard to murmur:

"I must say—I really must say!"

"Of course Carrie wants her side to win, and you must be careful in a contest," said Mrs. Pepper loudly. "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link."

Polly wanted to laugh, but Harry Worden was unsmiling.

"It's too late to change now," he said clearly. "You've had several weeks to select your team—your side, I should say. If we're ready, we'll begin now."

Polly waited a little breathlessly while he turned the pages of the riddle book. It was a new book, she could see—probably Mr. Helms had seen to that.

"All right, Polly Marley, see if you can answer this one," said Harry suddenly: "'What is the longest word in the English language?'"

Polly shivered with excitement. That was a riddle she knew! She tried to keep her voice steady as she answered.

"Smiles," she said clearly, "because it has a mile between its first and last letters."

"Right!" checked Harry, putting down a beautiful plus sign to the credit of the Riddle Club.

"Bet she knew it," whispered Carrie.

"This one is yours to solve, Mattie Helms," said Harry quickly: "'What is that which works when it plays and plays when it works?'"

"A mechanical boat," replied Mattie recklessly.

"Wrong," was the answer. "Can any one else on the Conundrum Club side give the right answer?"

"Oh, are you going to let us have more than one chance?" asked Carrie.

"If a member misses, I'll ask the other members of that side the same riddle till all have had a chance," explained Harry patiently. "It isn't the individual who wins a contest of this kind, but the team or side as a whole."

Carrie didn't understand this very well, but she was afraid the Riddle Club might in some way take advantage of the rule.

"Ward Larue and Artie Marley are so little, they'll probably miss all the riddles you ask them," she said. "Then do you think it would be fair to let Polly or some of the older ones answer the riddles they couldn't get?"

Harry Worden put down the riddle book and spoke very quietly.

"Since I have been asked to serve as referee," he said, "I think I may be trusted to make the necessary decisions. And surely, we are all anxious to play fairly."

He picked up the paper with the names on and scanned it quickly.

"Does any member of the Conundrum Club wish to answer that riddle?" he asked again.

"Is it a car?" ventured Joe Anderson.

"An automobile? No," said Harry. "You all give up? Very well then, as it's a perfectly good riddle, we'll try it on the other side. How about you, Artie Marley?"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Artie, in such evident haste that every one laughed.

"You mustn't give up without trying," said Harry, but he did not offer him another chance. Instead he asked Fred.

"It's a fountain," answered Fred confidently.

Down went a second plus sign opposite the name of the Riddle Club.

"Maybe they know this riddle book by heart," suggested Mattie, in a loud whisper.

"Your father gave me this book, Mattie," said Harry. "I believe it was one he sent out of town to get when this contest was first proposed."

That silenced Mattie, and it was Stella Dorman's turn.

" 'What is the first thing a gardener always sets in his garden,' Stella?" asked the referee.

"A wheel-barrow," said Stella, after a moment's thought.

"Wrong. What do you say, Joe?" Harry asked Joe Anderson.

"I say it's his feet," announced Joe slowly.

That was the right answer, and the Conundrum Club received a plus sign to balance the minus one it already had.

"Now I'm coming to you, Fred," said Harry, consulting his paper to be sure he had the name right. " 'What man has no father?' "

Fred was suddenly glad that he had not stayed home from Sunday school the Sunday before. His teacher had told him a riddle to help him remember the Bible lesson. And now Harry Worden had asked him that self-same riddle.

"I know," said Fred, so eagerly that he stammered a little. "It—it was Joshua, the son of Nun."

A third plus sign went down on the paper. Carrie and Mattie exchanged a frown while Polly beamed upon Fred.

It was Ben Asher's turn next, and he stumbled



over the riddle: "Why are trees like cannon?" but Carrie answered it for him.

"Because they shoot," she said.

"People plant them and then they shoot," corrected Harry. "Is the Riddle Club willing to let that answer stand as given? It is nearly right."

"Of course," said Polly instantly. "Count it right."

So the Conundrum Club gained the coveted plus sign.

Ward wriggled uneasily when he knew he could no longer escape.

"What plant do mice hate?" asked Harry, smiling.

Ward thought a few moments.

"I guess catnip," he said slowly. And he was as much surprised as any one to learn that he had given the correct answer.

"We need only one more," said Polly to herself. "Oh, wouldn't it be too lovely if we should win!"

"The score now stands, five plus signs for the Riddle Club," announced Harry unexpectedly, "and two plus signs and one minus for the Conundrum Club. If the Riddle Club gets one more plus sign, they will have won."

"I don't see how that can be," protested Carrie.

"It isn't fair to have asked them five riddles and us only three."

"They have answered two your side failed to solve," Harry reminded her.

"Let the Conundrum Club have the next two riddles," suggested Polly. "Then, if they answer them, that will make the number even and the last riddle will really decide."

"Is that suggestion approved?" asked the referee, glancing at the members of the Riddle Club.

They nodded solemnly.

"Very well, Albert Holmes, it is your turn," said Harry. "See if you can get this: 'What is taken from you before you get it?'"

Albert shook his head and Joe Anderson said "Your money." No one else would try.

"All wrong. Your photograph," said Harry swiftly. "Now then, Joe Anderson, suppose you try your luck: 'When a house is on fire, why does the piano have the least chance of escape?'"

"Because it hasn't any feet," said Joe with confidence. He usually solved riddles at the Conundrum Club meetings.

"Wrong. Who else will answer?" said the referee.

"Because it can't scale the walls?" blundered Carrie desperately.

"No one else willing to try? Because the fire engine cannot play upon it," said Harry. "And now comes the test for the Riddle Club. I believe it is your turn, Margy Williamson."

The members of the Riddle Club looked anxiously at Margy. Some riddles she guessed and some she didn't, and if there should be the slightest bit of arithmetic in the answer, she never would guess it in the world.

" 'What coat is finished without buttons and put on wet?' " asked Harry, smiling at the anxious little face.

Margy smiled back. She did not know the answer, but she would try her best.

"A dog's coat when he's had a bath," she said.

"Wrong. Want to try it, any one?" said the referee, the least bit regretfully.

"A coat of paint," said Jess. "I saw that man painting the garage," she added honestly, pointing through the window to where a man was working on the Helms' garage.

"Right!" In spite of his efforts to keep the triumph out of his voice, Harry Worden sounded vastly pleased. "Six plus signs make the Riddle Club the winner of this contest. They have solved every riddle asked them. May I offer my congratulations?"

Mrs. Helms came up and congratulated Polly,

and Mrs. Pepper did, too; but Mattie and Carrie went quickly out of the room. There did not seem to be anything for the Riddle Club to do, but to go home, which they did as soon as they could get away.

"We win the five dollars!" cried Fred joyfully, as soon as they were safely out of ear-shot.

"We can have our pins before school opens this fall," said Polly happily.

"Before we go camping, you mean," said Jess.

"Are we going camping? Who said so?" asked Polly, delight making her take a gutter in one flying leap. "Camping! I've always wanted to go."

"Well, of course, I'm not sure," said Jess more cautiously. "But I heard my mother talking to your mother yesterday. I was upstairs hunting for something in that hall closet that's built out over the porch. They were talking on the porch and I heard them say, 'the children will be wild to go, and Lake Bassing is such a safe, quiet place.' But I stopped listening, because that isn't polite."

"You're always polite at the wrong time," complained Margy. "But I don't care; if they said 'Lake Bassing,' that means camp for us."

"Let's go in and tell Mr. Marley we won the prize," suggested Fred. "He'll want to hear about the contest, too."

So they turned down the street that took them to the hardware store and trooped in to tell Mr. Marley their good news. They found both Mr. Williamson and Mr. Larue in Mr. Marley's store, and told their tale excitedly to the three fathers.

Their good times in camp—for Jess was right and Lake Bassing did mean camp—will be told in another book, to be entitled, "The Riddle Club in Camp."

"If we go to camp shall we give up our Riddle Club meetings?" questioned Margy.

"Oh, no! Never!" decided Polly quickly. "We can have our meetings on rainy days—when we can't go out for other sort of fun."

"Oh, won't we have the best times ever!" sang out Fred.

And all the other members of the Riddle Club agreed to *that*.

THE END

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